SERMONS,

BY

DR. GRANT.

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SERMONS

ON

VARIOUS SUBJECTS AND OCCASIONS.

BY ALEXANDER GRANT, *D.D.*

MINISTER OF THE ENGLISH EPISCOPAL CHAPEL AT DUNDEE.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

Ἡ Σωτηρια γαρ αυτη της πιστεως ἡμων ουκ εξ ευρεσιλογιας αλλα εξ αποδειξεων των θειων εστι γραφων. Cyril. Hierosol. Cat. iv. p. 56. Edit. Oxon.

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For by grace ye are ſaved through faith; and that not of yourſelves; it is the gift of God.

IN the laſt journey of St. Paul to Rome, we are told * that he took Epheſus in his way, in order to viſit the church which he had before eſtabliſhed in that city, and to confirm the faith of the believers who had formerly been converted by his preaching, as well as of others, who had experienced the ſame happy change in his abſence.

At this time he obſerved, with much concern, that ſome Jews who had embraced the Chriſtian faith, ſtill retained ſo great a veneration for their ancient ceremonies and cuſtoms, as to inſiſt upon the neceſſity of circumciſion, and other rites of the law of Moſes: this error, therefore, he ſtrenuouſly oppoſes, both in his diſcourſes and in this epiſtle, which was written from Rome during the time of his confinement there.

* Pearſon Annal. Paulin.

He begins this chapter by reminding them of their former unconverted eſtate, and the miſery of that condition; when they were dead in treſpaſſes and ſins; aliens from the commonwealth of Iſrael; ſtrangers from the covenants of promiſe; having no hope, and without God in the world. From this deplorable ſituation he tells them they are now delivered, by the goodneſs of God being extended to them, through the mediation and miniſtry of Jeſus Chriſt; not for any virtue or goodneſs of theirs, nor in conſideration of any work done by them, but as an effect of his own free grace and mercy; which makes him willing, that all men ſhould be ſaved, and come to the knowledge of the truth. This argument he enforces, from their own experience of the fact; for they received this grace before they had performed any of thoſe legal ſervices which theſe Judaizers would perſuade them were neceſſary.

The word which we tranſlate * *grace*, properly ſignifies favour: but if the knowledge of God and the privileges of the goſpel had been granted to theſe Epheſians, in conſequence, or in return for any works or ſervices of theirs, this would change the nature of the thing, and inſtead of a favour would conſtitute a debt.

* Χαρις.

Now

Now God is debtor to no one. All his creatures ſtand indebted to him for whatever they either have or hope for: his gifts therefore are free, and his bounty unreſtrained; and as he is the ſole proprietor of all things, ſo he can do what he will with his own. Therefore (ſays the apoſtle), not by works of any kind, but by grace ye are ſaved through faith: and leſt any one ſhould be puffed up with a falſe notion, that his faith may claim reward independent of the divine mercy; remember that even that ſaving principle is not of yourſelves: it is the gift of God. Now this free and voluntary grace, this ineſtimable gift of God, inſtead of being the effect of any goodneſs or inherent virtue in us, previous to its being beſtowed upon us, is in fact the efficient cauſe, and, as it were, the ſeed of all the virtue that ſprings up and grows in us afterwards; for it is by this alone (as the apoſtle tells us in another place) that we are taught, and enabled ** to deny ungodlineſs and worldly luſts, and to live ſoberly, righteouſly, and godly in the preſent world:* to do which is the ſum and ſubſtance of true goſpel righteouſneſs, and is a duty doubly incumbent on us, becauſe it proceeds from the unſpeakable favour and goodneſs of God beſtowed on us.

But here it may be natural to enquire, how this

* Tit. ii. 12.

goſpel-

goſpel-righteouſneſs is conveyed to us by faith? This queſtion might lead to a long and curious diſſertation on the different kinds and degrees of faith, proportioned to the nature of the evidence on which the aſſent of the mind reſts: but this not being neceſſary to the preſent argument, let it ſuffice to obſerve that true Chriſtian faith is that powerful, attractive principle, which by a ſtrong and divine ſympathy, draws down a heavenly virtue into the ſouls of believers; which forcibly moves them into a likeneſs and humble imitation of that divine goodneſs by which it lives and grows. This is that divine impreſs, which invincibly draws them in gradually to the Divinity; and thus unites them more and more to the centre of life and love. It is a moving principle in the heart, which feeling, by an inward ſenſation, the workings of the divine love, immediately complies with its motions, and, with the moſt ardent deſire, is perpetually riſing into an intimacy and union with it; and being at firſt produced and enlivened, by the ſenſe of the divine goodneſs, it always breathes and pants after more and larger communications of it, as the means of its nouriſhment and growth.

But the more clearly to unfold the communication of righteouſneſs by faith, let it be remembered, that the goſpel lays a ſtrong foundation of a cheerful

ful dependence on, and affiance in the divine bounty and goodneſs: for we there have the beſt poſſible ſecurity of God's readineſs to relieve ſuch forlorn and deſolate creatures as we are; that he has no pleaſure in our deſtruction, becauſe he has ſent his ever bleſſed Son into the world to ſave us from it.

We are told of a powerful Interceſſor, who is our Mediator, our Advocate, in the court of heaven; who pleads our cauſe in virtue of his ſufferings, and who is himſelf able to ſave to the uttermoſt all that come to God through him.

We are informed of a new and living way to the throne of grace, to the holy place which our Saviour has conſecrated through his fleſh.

We are aſſured of his moſt gracious promiſe, that them who come to him he will in no wiſe caſt out; that whoſoever believeth in him ſhall not periſh, but have everlaſting life.

We have the moſt gracious invitations held out to weary and heavy-laden ſinners, to come unto Chriſt; who ſo ſure as they do, ſhall find reſt to their ſouls. The ſecrets of heaven, or (as St. Paul expreſſes it), the whole council of God is revealed to us, whereby we know and perceive, that the glory of God on high is happily made conſiſtent with peace upon earth, and good will to-

wards

wards men; and ſweetly united in the chorus of thoſe heavenly hymns which are ſung by angels to his praiſe.

We are taught that God is love; and therefore his diſpenſations towards us are wholly the irradiations of divine bounty and goodneſs. There is no condemnation to them that are in Chriſt Jeſus, who walk not after the fleſh, but after the ſpirit; that ſpirit of divine love, whoſe powerful energy quickens and actuates the ſouls of believers into a lively ſenſe of a bleſſed immortality.

That is that powerful and mighty ſpirit which will, if we comply with it, lead us into all truth, and teach us all things, even the hidden things of God.

All this and much more, we learn from the goſpel; for ſhould I run through all the motives and arguments that prove this divine love, and perſuade us to accept it, and to depend upon it, I muſt read you the whole volume wherein the bleſſed diſpenſation is recorded.

Now certainly a true and lively faith in this love of God, and a ſerious and continual converſe with his goodneſs, by a cordial entertainment and thorough perſuaſion of it, will naturally beget in us the ſentiment of gratitude and love to him, in return for his incomparable goodneſs and love

to

to us; which is the nobleſt, as well as the moſt powerful principle of obedience, that can poſſibly affect the human mind. * *We love him* (ſays St. John) *becauſe he firſt loved us; and this is the love* of God, *that we walk after his commandments*. Thus faith becomes the fruitful fource of gratitude, love, and every good word and work.

This equally baniſhes from the mind all atheiſm and ſuperſtition; caſts down every high thought, and every proud imagination, that would exalt itſelf againſt God. It ſets the ſoul of the believer above all thoſe low, mean, and partial loves, that tie us to the luſts and vanities of this world, raiſes him beyond the condition of the ſlave of ſin, and exalts him into the glorious liberty of the ſons of God; and fills his heart with a more exalted and generous love, the love and admiration of God, and the moſt diſintereſted love, the moſt diffuſive benevolence and charity to all mankind.

True Chriſtian faith is not a dead or languid belief of certain ſpeculative points of doctrine, or propoſitions to be proved by logical deductions; but a lively and active principle in the ſoul, founded upon the love of God, and manifeſted by a

* 1 John iv. 19. 2 John 6.

ſincere

ſincere and univerſal obedience of all his commands.

This is that powerful inſtrument of holineſs, which alone can remove the mountains of human prejudice and pride, which would exalt themſelves againſt God, or make men imagine themſelves to be wiſe above that which is written.

When manhood was united to God in the perſon of Jeſus Chriſt, he thereby gave mankind a pledge and ſecurity, of what he would farther do in this matter, by fixing human nature in the cloſeſt poſſible connexion with himſelf, and diſpenſing and communicating himſelf to man, in a way as nearly correſpondent and agreeable as poſſible to that firſt example of ſuch union.

Hence we are told of Chriſt being formed in us, and the ſpirit of Chriſt dwelling in us, of our being made conformable to him, of being as he was in the world, of having fellowſhip with him, of our living in him, and his living in us, of dying and being buried, of riſing again and aſcending into heaven with him, and the like: becauſe indeed the ſame ſpirit that dwelt in him, diffuſes its mighty energy and virtue into the ſouls of believers, in ſuch meaſure and proportion, as is fitted to form them

them more and more, into a juſt reſemblance and conformity to him, the firſt pattern and example; whence it is, that we have ſo many lively and tranſporting deſcriptions of the union of Chriſt with believers in the goſpel; which is ſo very intimate, as intitles them to be called even members of his body, and other appellations of the cloſeſt and moſt endearing connexion. All which is brought about, through the efficacy of the eternal ſpirit, when by a true faith we deny ourſelves and our own will, and, under a deep ſenſe of our weakneſs and inſufficiency, ſubmit to his wiſdom and power, comply with his will, and, by a holy affiance in him, yield ourſelves wholly up to his pleaſure; for theſe are the vital acts of a true Chriſtian ſaving faith.

From what has been ſaid, I think it will be no difficult matter to comprehend the meaning of St. Paul in thoſe epiſtles of his, wherein he ſo much magnifies faith, in oppoſition to external performances, or what he calls the works of the law.

We muſt not, like the builders of Babel, imagine that we ſhall reach to heaven by our works. We muſt not think to take that citadel by ſtorm, and wreſt the crown of glory from the hand of Almighty Power, by our own ſtrength. We muſt

not ſue for eternal life, in the way of commutative juſtice, nor plead for it as the reward of our merits, or the wages due for our labour and toil in God's vineyard. No; God reſiſteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble. Our ſuit to heaven muſt be that of an humble ſelf-denying ſoul, not boaſting of its Phariſaical merits; but, like the publican in the parable, deeply ſenſible of its unworthineſs, and intreating pardon for its offences. He who truſts in the Lord with all his heart, ſhall find his never-failing protection his ſure guide to happineſs; while all who lean to their own underſtanding, will find they have truſted to a broken reed: he filleth the hungry with good things, and the rich he ſendeth empty away. The hungry and thirſty ſouls who hunger and thirſt after him and his righteouſneſs, ſhall be filled with all the fulneſs of God; while thoſe who depend on themſelves, for thoſe bleſſings which he alone can beſtow, will find themſelves miſerably deceived and diſappointed.

That this truly Chriſtian grace may be found in us; that the love of God may be ſhed abroad in our hearts, and be the governing principle of our lives, let us devoutly pray in the pious language which our holy church has taught us, and

ſay

ſay, O God, who haſt prepared for them that love thee ſuch good things as paſs man's underſtanding, pour into our hearts ſuch love of thee, that we, loving thee above all things, may obtain thy promiſes, which exceed all that we can deſire, through Jeſus Chriſt our Lord. Amen.

SERMON XX.

1 TIMOTHY iii. 9.

Holding the myſtery of the faith in a pure conſcience.

THIS epiſtle being written to Timothy, for his own particular inſtruction in the duties of his office as a miniſter in the church, conſiſts chiefly of ſuch rules and directions as are neceſſary to be obſerved by thoſe who exerciſe that ſacred function.

Timothy had lately been ordained biſhop of the church of Epheſus; and this epiſtle was written to remind him of the particulars of the charge the apoſtle had given him at his ordination: but anxious as he appears to be for the good conduct of the paſtor, he is not forgetful of that of his people; and the ſame words, by which he intends to feed the ſhepherd, will be found a ſalutary paſture for the ſheep.

Of this kind I take to be the words of our text; and we ſhall do well to attend to them accordingly.

It is unqueſtionably the duty of the laity, as well as of the clergy, to hold the myſtery of the faith in a pure conſcience; ſince without it, the profeſſion of Chriſtianity itſelf is but an empty name.

It ought indeed to be conſidered as the chief ornament of thoſe who undertake any office or adminiſtration in the church; but the duty is by no means confined to them. By the faith in the paſſage before us, is evidently meant the Chriſtian religion; that faith which the apoſtle profeſſed, and which he made it the buſineſs of his life to propagate and eſtabliſh: but why it is called a myſtery merits inquiry.

Myſtery, in its primary application, means a ſecret, a thing hid from our knowledge till it be revealed to us. Myſteries, therefore, in a religious view, are ſuch truths as the light of nature, or the reſearches of human reaſon, could not have diſcovered, and which we can only learn from divine revelation. Of theſe there are three ſorts: one ſort are ſuch, as though they could not be known to us without revelation, yet, when they are revealed, may be in ſome meaſure explained and underſtood: ſuch are, the doctrine of the ſatisfaction of Chriſt; the reſurrection of the dead; the pardon of ſins, through the merits and interceſſion of our Lord;

Lord; of eternal ſalvation, or eternal damnation in the world to come.

Another ſort are ſuch, as though revealed, and clearly eſtabliſhed upon the ſame authority as the former, yet we cannot comprehend the mode or manner of them, and therefore can never underſtand or explain them: ſuch are, the myſtery of the bleſſed Trinity; the incarnation of Chriſt; the union of his divine and human natures in one perſon; the ſpiritual union between Chriſt and his church; and the operation of divine grace in the hearts of believers.

The third ſort are ſuch as neither our reaſon nor even revelation can make us acquainted with, in the preſent ſtate of our exiſtence, and with ſuch faculties as we now poſſeſs: of this kind is the manner of God's exiſtence, the nature of a ſpirit, the union of ſoul and body; the joys of heaven; and the torments of the damned. Theſe are myſteries of the higheſt difficulty, as they muſt continue unexplained; nor can they be unfolded to us till our capacities are enlarged, our faculties changed, and our perceptions fitted for the reception of ſuch knowledge, which is at preſent far beyond our reach.

Theſe definitions of the term myſtery, may help us to account for the apoſtle's application of it to the

the Chriſtian religion: for this is that myſtery which was hid from ages and generations; and muſt for ever have remained ſo, had it not by divine mercy been made manifeſt to the ſaints.

The glad tidings of man's redemption, by the death and paſſion of Jeſus Chriſt, muſt have remained an unſearchable myſtery, had not God in his infinite goodneſs made it known. For if we ſuppoſe, that this merciful diſcovery had been hid from us till now; by what deduction of reaſon, or by what reſearch of human underſtanding, could we poſſibly have diſcovered it?

The wiſeſt philoſophers of antiquity, the moſt enlightened ſages of Greece and Rome, tried in vain to find out a ſcheme by which man might purchaſe reconciliation with his Maker, or the wreck of human nature might be ſaved from perdition. The beſt ſchemes they could contrive, were ſuch as their own reaſon condemned; and their moſt laborious reſearches ſtill left the mind deſtitute of aſſurance, without hope, and conſequently void of conſolation.

And thus the whole world lay involved in darkneſs and the ſhadow of death, till it pleaſed God to publiſh the terms of ſalvation; and, by the goſpel of his ever bleſſed Son, diſcover, amid the juſtice

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that ought to be feared, ſuch mercy as was not to be expected.

This mercy is by the goodneſs of God no longer a ſecret to us. He who firſt contrived the gracious plan of our deliverance, has, with the ſame benevolence, publiſhed it, and given us a ſure and ſtedfaſt hope, that through him we ſhall inherit eternal life. But the work of redemption is a myſtery ſtill, notwithſtanding its publication, inaſmuch as we are unable to penetrate the depths of the divine œconomy; or, by the principles of human reaſon, dive into his counſels, or account for the ſeveral ſteps of his procedure in this wonderful diſpenſation. It is a ſcheme of Providence too deep for man to fathom; a ſcheme which even the angels deſire to look into; and which, after all their inquiries, they are contented to adore at an awful diſtance.

The ſum of all is this, that as the ſecret purpoſe of God to redeem mankind, was an inſcrutable myſtery till it was revealed; ſo the mode and manner of it, and the doctrines which it holds out as objects of faith to believers, continue to be myſteries ſtill, notwithſtanding ſuch revelation: neither is it poſſible it ſhould be otherwiſe, unleſs human reaſon were a fit and adequate rule, whereby

to

to meaſure the proceedings and purpoſes of God; which we know it never can be: for as far as the heavens are above the earth, ſo far are the ways of God above our ways, and his thoughts above our thoughts.

Having thus explained the meaning of the term myſtery, and the ground of its application to the Chriſtian religion, let us next enquire what we are to underſtand by keeping it in a pure conſcience.

Conſcience is that principle in the ſoul, or power of the underſtanding, by which we are enabled to judge our own actions, and paſs upon them the ſentence of approbation, or the contrary, as we are ſenſible they deſerve. Purity of conſcience, therefore, muſt neceſſarily depend on purity of action; and this again muſt be tried by ſome rule or law acknowledged and allowed as the ſtandard of moral conduct.

Again, to hold the myſtery of faith, is not barely to give an aſſent to the doctrines of the goſpel; but to embrace them ſeriouſly, heartily, and upon principle; to adhere to them at all times and upon all occaſions, not ſlightly, or hypocritically, becauſe they are popular or faſhionable, but ſincerely and conſtantly, becauſe they are true, and becauſe the God of truth has revealed them. Holding the faith in a pure conſcience, therefore, muſt mean,

holding it with ſuch a converſation as conſcience ſhall approve; and is as if the apoſtle had ſaid, holding the myſtery of the faith in purity and holineſs of life.

It is evident that too many are careleſs of this latter part of the apoſtolic injunction, while yet they have, or think they have, a high regard for the former. How many are there, who can warmly contend for the goſpel, as the myſtery of faith, but never think themſelves bound to obey it as a rule of life! Who maintain its principles, but neglect its precepts! Who, in a word, believe, but will not obey the goſpel! But let not ſuch flatter themſelves with the title of Chriſtians; theirs is but an empty name: it may indeed be true, that they hold the truth, but they hold it in unrighteouſneſs; and all they have to hope from it ſhall, like the hope of the hypocrite, periſh*. Such pretenders to religion prove its moſt formidable adverſaries, making more apoſtates by their lives than converts by their arguments.

You ſee then how properly the apoſtle, when exhorting his convert Timothy to hold the myſtery of the faith, here adds the purity of conſcience as a neceſſary qualification to the ſoundneſs of his belief. But let us not imagine that this precept,

* Job viii. 13.

or

or the application of it, was confined to Timothy or his ſucceſſors in office. The precept is general, and applicable to all ſtations in life, and virtually includes an admonition to all who profeſs the religion of Chriſt, not only to hold faſt and perſevere in the true faith, but alſo to live as becomes the goſpel; to order their converſation according to its precepts; to live ſoberly, righteouſly, and godly, which is the end of their calling, and the foundation of their hopes*; not only to make themſelves as well acquainted as they are able with all the neceſſary and ſaving truths of their holy religion, but alſo, to the beſt of their power, yield an univerſal and willing obedience to its laws.

This is holding the faith in a pure conſcience; and whoever does this, though his piety may be attended with infirmity, need not fear the conſequence. If the heart be ſprinkled from an evil conſcience, he may draw near to God with a true heart, in the full aſſurance of faith.

Infirmities and imperfections we muſt bear about us, while we continue to inhabit theſe frail tabernacles of clay. Perfection belongs not to man. Our nature admits not of it. Our defective ideas of God and things pertaining to him, the ſhallowneſs of our underſtanding, the deceitfulneſs of our

* Tit. ii. 12, 13

reaſonings,

reaſonings, and the frequent errors of our judgment, muſt render all our performances, and even our beſt endeavours after holineſs, far ſhort of that exalted purity, which would of itſelf deſerve to be rewarded; but our comfort is, that as we cannot arrive at this high degree of unerring obedience, ſo neither is it expected of us. God who knows our frame, remembers, that we are but duſt, and hath in mercy allowed us to hope, that the tears of repentance ſhall blot out the errors of infirmity.

But there is another deſcription of perſons, who, knowing and believing the myſteries of our holy religion, becauſe they are revealed in the word of God, yet cenſure the miniſters of the goſpel for treating of thoſe myſteries: becauſe truly, they cannot explain or demonſtrate them as they would mechanical or mathematical truths; and would be glad that their preachers ſhould always confine their diſcourſes to points of pure morality, without meddling with ſuch inexplicable articles of faith as paſs man's underſtanding. But in this we cannot indulge their fancy.

We are the ſtewards of the myſteries of God, and we muſt not withhold them from his people. For in ſtewards, it is eſpecially required that a man be found faithful; and we muſt not avoid the publication or the inculcation of goſ-

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pel truths, becauſe they are myſterious; nor is it reaſonable that we ſhould; for the whole counſel of God, in the redemption of mankind, is founded in the ſublimeſt, I might perhaps have better ſaid, the profoundeſt myſtery.

The miniſters of the goſpel muſt preach the goſpel as it is, and make known the counſel of God to their hearers, as far as it is known to themſelves; nor muſt they preſume to conceal any doctrine of divine revelation, becauſe it is above the meaſure of a finite mind to conceive, or finite abilities to explain and demonſtrate.

But there are others, who quarrel with Chriſtianity altogether, becauſe it contains any myſteries at all. Why, ſay they, ſhould revelation contain any thing incomprehenſible? Or, why ſhould not God, in revealing a religion to mankind, bring all the parts of it within the ſphere of human intelligence? Or, why are we required to believe things, of which we can have no adequate ideas? They might as reaſonably aſk, why we are not created of a higher order of beings? And why God has given us faculties inferior to his own? Or, why he hath given us any religion whatever, ſince without myſtery there can be none? The foundation of all religion is the belief of God's exiſtence: for he that cometh to God muſt, before all things,

believe

believe that he is; that is, he muſt believe an eternal effect, without any producing or pre-exiſting cauſe: A myſtery ſo far beyond the comprehenſion of the moſt acute and penetrating wiſdom of man, that if ever we come to underſtand it (which I confeſs is with me a matter of great doubt), it muſt be by ſuch an enlargement of our capacity, as ſhall enable us to ſee him as he is. And yet were it poſſible to deny the truth of this ineffable myſtery, whoever did ſo could not, conſiſtently with common ſenſe, profeſs or practiſe any religion at all.

Finally, ſince we are required to hold the myſtery of the faith in a pure conſcience, which, as I have already ſhown, is the ſame thing as holding it in a holy converſation; how weak, not to ſay how wicked, muſt it be to ſeparate thoſe duties, as if the one were neceſſary and the other needleſs. Yet certain it is that ſuch pernicious doctrines have been held and propagated in the church. It has been maintained by one party, that by our perſonal union with Chriſt, as members of his myſtical body, we are to be ſaved through faith in his righteouſneſs, without any attempt of our own to imitate his purity or obey his commands. Such doctrine I call pernicious, becauſe it tends to encourage that indolence and want of care in our religious concerns, to which

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we are, God knows, but too much inclined however. But what ſays Chriſt to ſuch doctrine? Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit, ſo ſhall ye be my diſciples, John xv. 8. And again, ver. 10. if ye keep my commandments, ye ſhall abide in my love, even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love. And yet more expreſsly, Mat. vii. 21. Not every one that ſaith unto me, Lord, Lord, ſhall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my father which is in heaven. In vain, therefore, do men pretend to believe, if they refuſe to obey the goſpel: in vain ſhall we cry, Lord, Lord, if we are found to be workers of iniquity.

Others, again, perceiving the evil tendency of this opinion, have run into the oppoſite extreme, and maintained the efficacy of good works, without or even in oppoſition to faith altogether: but neither the one nor the other of theſe is the true Chriſtian doctrine; for ſince without faith it is impoſſible to pleaſe God, we can have no reaſon to hope for ſalvation without it. And ſo is to be underſtood that paſſage of St. John in his goſpel, chap. iii. 17, 18. *For God ſent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be ſaved.* Now how the world is to be ſaved by Chriſt, without believing on him,

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is difficult to conceive, and impoſſible to happen: for thus our Lord proceeds in the next verſe. *He that believeth on him is not condemned; but he that believeth not is condemned already, becauſe he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.*

You ſee then the neceſſity of faith, in order to ſalvation; but that of a pure and holy life is no leſs apparent from what has been already ſaid. And agreeable hereto are the words of the apoſtle to Titus, chap. iii. 8. *This is a faithful ſaying, and this I will that you affirm conſtantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to mantain good works. Theſe things are good and profitable unto men.*

The ſhort of the matter is this: faith is the foundation of all religion, but to faith muſt be added virtue; for if it be not thus accompanied, it is dead, and cannot be acceptable in the ſight of God.

SER-

SERMON XXI.

1 KINGS xviii. 21. (former part.)

And Elijah came unto all the people, and ſaid, How long halt ye between two opinions?

THE occaſion of theſe words being ſpoken, was the great defection of the Jews under the wicked reign of Ahab, and his impious wife Jezebel; who, having perſecuted the prophets, and exterminated the worſhip of the true God, had eſtabliſhed idolatry in its ſtead, and drawn off their ſubjects to the worſhip of Baal.

It ſeems, however, by the queſtion in the text, that the people in general had not ſo totally forgotten or forſaken the religion of their fathers, as to caſt off all thoughts of returning to their duty, though the example of their king, and the influence of his authority, had made them doubtful which part to take, and had even induced thoſe who were beſt affected, to follow the ſtream of the general depravity ſo far, as to take the tone of the court in ſerving the idol of the ſovereign.

This, however worthy of cenſure, is by no means uncommon. Perſons in the higher ſpheres of life will always find others ready to fall in with their taſte and opinions, and too often to follow their example, even againſt their own conviction. It was evidently the caſe in the inſtance before us. The people had forſaken the true God, while yet they believed him to be ſuch; and therefore, when Elijah charges them with duplicity in this matter, they had not a word to ſay for themſelves.

Ignorance of the true religion was not their caſe: their fault was, not acting up to what knowledge they had. Now this is exactly the caſe with the generality of mankind in all ages. The number of real, or even profeſſing infidels, is ſmall, in compariſon with that of ſuch as live under the pretence of religion, but come ſhort of its obligations in their conduct, and I am ſorry to ſay it, but with reſpect to Chriſtians the obſervation is too manifeſt to admit of a doubt. So that we have ceaſed to wonder at ſeeing men living in a Chriſtian country, nay, and even appearing frequently in places of Chriſtian worſhip, and yet totally negligent of performing any other duty of the Chriſtian religion. Nay, it is nothing uncommon, to ſee them retire from the place of devotion, to that of riot, intemperance, and blaſphemy.

Surely

Surely the beſt we can ſay of ſuch as theſe, is that they halt between two opinions: and though they do not immediately fall down and worſhip an image, as thoſe apoſtate Jews did, yet they may be truly ſaid to ſet up their idols in their hearts, while they pretend to worſhip God in the aſſemblies of his people, and are at the ſame time devoted to their ſinful luſts and irregular gratifications. But hear what the Lord ſays of ſuch hypocritical worſhippers, by his prophet Ezekiel: *Every one of the houſe of Iſrael, or of the ſtranger that ſojourneth in Iſrael, who ſeparateth himſelf from me, and ſetteth up his idols in his heart, and putteth the ſtumbling block of his iniquity before his face, and cometh to a prophet to enquire of him concerning me; I the Lord will anſwer him by myſelf. And I will ſet my face againſt that man, and will make him a ſign and a proverb, and I will cut him off from the midſt of my people, and ye ſhall know that I am the Lord**.

And let it not be imagined, that this threatening was peculiar to the nation of the Jews, or the days of the prophets; the ſame is the language of holy writ, under the clearer and more complete revelation of the will of God in the goſpel of his ever-bleſſed Son. There we are told, in the plaineſt terms, that no worſhip will be acceptable to God,

*Ezek. xiv. 7, 8.

but

but that which is performed in ſpirit and in truth; that not every one who ſaith unto him, Lord, Lord, ſhall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of his Father who is in heaven. I take this alſo to be the fault ſo ſeverely reproved and threatened in the church of Laodicea, Rev. ii. 16. *So, then, becauſe thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will ſpew thee out of my mouth.*

I know not which to reckon greateſt, the folly of this ſin, or its wickedneſs. Every degree of falſehood and deceit, practiſed even upon men, is on all hands allowed to be wicked; but for a man to imagine that he can impoſe upon God, that the ſearcher of hearts can be deceived by the outward appearance of pretended ſanctity, is ſuch monſtrous, ſuch ineffable folly, as nothing ſhort of abſolute and unaffected ideotiſm, or madneſs, can excuſe: and yet ſuch folly and wickedneſs have too much prevailed in all ages and nations of the world. The Pſalmiſt complains of it in his 94th Pſalm, which drew from him this powerful remonſtrance at the 8th and 9th verſes. *Underſtand, ye brutiſh among the people: And ye fools, when will ye be wiſe? He that planted the ear, ſhall he not hear? He that formed the eye, ſhall he not ſee?*

To imagine that the omniſcient and omnipreſent

ſent God can be impoſed upon, by any artifice or ſtratagem of his creatures; that he who created us ſhould be ignorant of, or unacquainted with the work of his own hands, muſt argue the groſſeſt ſtupidity, as well as the moſt blaſphemous wickedneſs.

Among the ignorant part of the heathen world, indeed ſuch an opinion might be in ſome meaſure pardonable, becauſe the notion they had of the nature of their deities was quite conſiſtent with it: but with us who live under the light of the goſpel, to act as if we knew no better than they, is the moſt monſtrous abſurdity.

Let us ſee the behaviour of the Iſraelites in the caſe before us; and, as all holy ſcriptures are written for our learning, try to improve by their example.

While Elijah was ſafely lodged with the widow of Zarephath, Ahab and Jezebel were making diligent ſearch after him, with an intention to put him to death; and not being able to find him, they diſcharged their fury upon all the prophets they could meet with.

The time at length arrived, when God, in pity to Iſrael, determined to put an end to the terrible drought which had been ſo deſtructive to their land: he accordingly commanded the prophet to

ſhow

ſhow himſelf to Ahab, who at this time had given directions to Obadiah the governor of his houſe, to make a progreſs through one part of the country, and ſearch for graſs near all the rivers and ſprings, to ſupply their preſent neceſſity, and keep their cattle from periſhing with want, while he himſelf took another route with the ſame deſign; by which, as the ſacred hiſtorian obſerves, they divided the land between them, in order to proceed with the greater expedition. But Elijah having met with Obadiah in the way, ſtopt his farther proceeding, and ſent him to announce his arrival to the king; who, after ſome ſharp words of contention, agreed to the prophet's propoſal, of aſſembling all Iſrael (by which we are only to underſtand a great concourſe of people) at mount Carmel, where he meant to give them ocular proof of the power of the true God, over the Sidonian idol which they impiouſly worſhipped, by an experiment which none of them ſhould be able to deny. To this numerous aſſembly, the prophet addreſſes himſelf in the words of our text. *How long halt ye between two opinions? If* (ſays he) *the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him.*

The people, intimidated no doubt by the preſence of the king and the prieſts of Baal, who had been ſummoned to this meeting, made no reply to the

the prophet, but waited, probably with ſome degree of anxiety, the reſult of the conteſt, between their new ſet up deity and the God of their fathers. Elijah then proceeded to the trial of the controverſy. *Here* (ſaid he) *I only am left of the prophets of the Lord*, and Baal's prophets are 450 men. Let a ſacrifice be offered by them, and another by me, to our reſpective Gods, and let that God be acknowledged for the true God, who ſhall ſend fire from heaven to conſume his own ſacrifice. The ſucceſs of the experiment plainly demonſtrated the truth which the prophet meant to eſtabliſh, *viz.* that there is but one living and true God, to whom worſhip and adoration is due from all his rational creatures. It proves alſo, that our homage and ſervice muſt be paid to him only, and that he will not give his glory to another, nor ſuffer us with impunity to ſet up our idols in our hearts in oppoſition to him. Contrary to this appointment are all thoſe who ſet up any idol for an object of worſhip, either in oppoſition to the true God, or in conjunction with him; who worſhip the true God in an idolatrous manner, or in a manner which he has forbidden, or who worſhip him through imaginary and falſe mediators, in diminution of the honour due to Jeſus Chriſt, the only true and appointed Mediator between God and man.

Of

Of this laſt ſpecies of idolatry we have an example even in the Chriſtian church. The church of Rome notoriouſly ſets up falſe mediators, angels, and ſaints, and eſpecially the Virgin Mary, as interceſſors with God for the ſins of men, and advocates to plead for ſinners at the throne of grace, in oppoſition to, or in derogation of the Son of God; who is in ſcripture ſet forth as the propitiator of our ſins, and our only advocate with the Father.

To ſay that ſuch people halt between two opinions, would be ſaying leſs than the truth; for the truth is, that by praying to thoſe ſpurious mediators, they plainly are guilty of idolatry.

The popiſh notion of numerous mediators, ſeems evidently derived from the ancient idolatry of the heathens; who thought, that, beſides the great and powerful celeſtial gods, there were other beings, inferior to them, but ſuperior to us, by whoſe miniſtry and interpoſition our devotions were conveyed to them, and who had the direction of the world committed to them. In the Jewiſh religion, God particularly guarded his people againſt this ſpecies of idolatry: *Thou ſhalt worſhip the Lord thy God, and him only ſhalt thou ſerve*, was the language of their law. They were indeed told that there were angels or miniſtering ſpirits, but were poſitively forbidden to worſhip them; all religious

ligious adoration, was by their law confined to God, and him only. But if the worſhip of angels, or ſpirits of an order ſuperior to man, was a crime under the Jewiſh adminiſtration, how much more muſt it be ſuch to worſhip Baal, which in fact was no more than the image of a man who had been dead many years! Accordingly we find the prophets of Baal were immediately put to death; in order to ſhow the idolaters an act of God's juſtice, as they had lately ſeen one of his power. And though judgment be not ſo ſpeedily executed in every inſtance, yet the juſtice of God, which, like the reſt of his attributes, is unchangeable, will not ſuffer the guilty to eſcape: for he hath appointed a day, in which he will judge the world in righteouſneſs, when every thought of the heart, with every ſecret thing, ſhall be brought to light; when every unruly luſt, every diſorderly paſſion, every proud or vain imagination, which the heart of man hath ſet up againſt God, ſhall like Baal be confounded; and all who cheriſh them, who practiſe guilt or hypocriſy with God, ſhall like his prophets be ſlain. That we may avoid this dreadful fate, let us take care that our lives correſpond with our profeſſion, and that we practiſe no deceit with God or man; but in ſimplicity and godly ſincerity let

us have our converſation in the preſent world; remembering that this and this alone will prepare us for a happy entrance into that world where our ſtate will be unchangeable and everlaſting.

SER-

SERMON XXII.

PSALM CXIX. 152.

Concerning thy teſtimonies, I have known of old that thou haſt founded them for ever.

HOWEVER many, or however different, the outward diſpenſations of religion to mankind have been, yet the method of obtaining ſalvation, which is the ultimate end of all religion, has been always the ſame; namely, real inward goodneſs and piety.

We know, indeed, that God has in his wiſdom thought fit to change the external form of religion, according to the different circumſtances of mankind, and the ſituation of the world at the different periods when thoſe changes took place.

In Paradiſe, our firſt parents were commanded to abſtain from the fruit of one particular tree, as a token of their dependence upon the providence and ſubmiſſion to the authority of God. As ſoon as they had tranſgreſſed this plain and ſimple precept, and the Divine goodneſs had promiſed a Redeemer

deemer in the ſeed of the woman, ſacrifice became the mode of religious worſhip, and this undoubtedly by divine appointment: for certainly no one could have thought of offering beaſts to God, or imagined it poſſible that he ſhould be intreated by the deſtruction of his creatures, unleſs thoſe oblations had been of his own appointment.

In about ten generations after the flood, when mankind had multiplied on the earth, and their vices increaſed with their numbers, God gave Iſrael a law of formal rites and ceremonies, to ſeparate that people, whom he had choſen, from their idolatrous neighbours. But when the fulneſs of time was come, in which the myſtery which had been hidden from ages and generations, was to be revealed to the ſaints; then all thoſe types and figures, which had before been appointed as the means of religious intercourſe between God and man, were by the Divine wiſdom abrogated, and the pure and ſpiritual religion of faith and obedience eſtabliſhed in their ſtead.

But, under all theſe different diſpenſations, vice and virtue ſtill preſerve their nature; and nothing but real purity and goodneſs, could at any time recommend mankind to the favour and acceptance of God.

The murder of Abel, for inſtance, was no leſs a crime

crime in the days of Cain than it is now. And we have no reaſon to doubt, but the different degree of acceptance which the ſacrifices of theſe two met with depended, in a great meaſure, upon the different diſpoſitions of the men who offered them, and their conduct in other reſpects; and indeed this ſeems to be confirmed by the voice of God himſelf, who puts this emphatical queſtion to Cain: If thou doſt well, ſhalt thou not be accepted? which was in effect telling him, that his acceptance depended, not ſo much on the nature or frequency of his addreſſes to him, as on the uprightneſs and purity of his conduct in other reſpects: And the ſame is confirmed to us by a number of inſtances in holy writ: that the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayers; but his countenance is againſt them that do evil, to root out the remembrance of them from the earth: and the ungodly and ſuch as delight in wickedneſs, doth his ſoul abhor. When the wicked Jews would have fain compounded for their ſins by offering numerous and coſtly ſacrifices, and thought to atone for their many offences by multiplying their oblations, he addreſſes them by the prophet Iſaiah in theſe remarkable words. * *To what purpoſe is the multitude of your ſacrifices unto me,*

* Iſ. i. 11, &c.

ſaith

ſaith the Lord? I am full of the burnt-offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beaſts, and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he-goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hands, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations: incenſe is an abomination unto me: the new moons and ſabbaths, the calling of aſſemblies, I cannot away with, it is iniquity even the ſolemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feaſts my ſoul hateth; they are a trouble unto me, I am weary to bear them. And when ye ſpread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you, yea when ye make many prayers, I will not hear. Now theſe very ſacrifices were the ſame which were contained in God's law to the Iſraelites; nay the times and manner of offering them, the very new moons and the ſabbaths, of which he expreſſes ſo much contempt and abhorrence, were of his own ſpecial appointment: it could not therefore be any thing either in the nature or manner of this ſervice that rendered it unacceptable: it muſt be ſomething in the lives or diſpoſitions of the worſhippers, that rendered them and their ſervices unworthy of acceptance. And what this was, we are immediately told in theſe words, *Your hands are full of blood.* They were murderers and oppreſſors, and therefore all their zeal and buſtle about ſacrifices and ſolemnities were of no value: but if they meant

meant that their prayers ſhould be heard, or their ſacrifices accepted, in the ſight of God, the prophet directs them by what means they may beſt attain their ends. *Waſh you* (ſays he) *make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; ceaſe to do evil, learn to do well, ſeek judgment, relieve the oppreſſed, judge the fatherleſs, plead for the widow:* and then he promiſes them forgiveneſs and the divine bleſſing. But if they continue obſtinate in their rebellion and wickedneſs, he aſſures them, that their ſacrifices, ſo far from being an acceptable ſervice, or procuring them the divine favour, would only add to the weight of their condemnation: for that in this caſe he that killeth an ox, with a view to offer it in ſacrifice, is as if he ſlew a man; he that ſacrificeth a lamb as if he cut off a dog's neck; he that offereth an oblation, as if he offered ſwine's blood; and he that burneth incenſe, as he that bleſſeth an idol.

Thus you ſee, that under the legal as well as the patriarchal diſpenſation, the conſtant indiſpenſable condition of obtaining the divine favour, was always the ſame: purity of heart and holineſs of life: and that thouſands of rams, or ten thouſands of rivers of oil, the moſt coſtly and numerous oblations, are not equal in the ſight of God to ſincere

and

and humble piety towards him, and juſtice, charity, and mercy towards men.

And the ſame is exactly true, under the clearer and better diſpenſation which has been revealed in Chriſt Jeſus. By him this doctrine has received its fulleſt and completeſt proof, that without holineſs no man ſhall ſee the Lord.

He has indeed, by his oblation of himſelf, purchaſed redemption for all who comply with the terms of his goſpel; by him alone we are put in a ſtate of ſalvation. The ineſtimable value of his ſacrifice is the price of our ranſom, the very means of our being brought (if I may uſe the expreſſion) into a poſſibility of being ſaved: but he is ſo far from diſpenſing with the neceſſity of, or leſſening the former obligations to a holy life, that he has enforced it by every argument capable of influencing a rational mind.

If our hopes can be excited by the promiſe of reward, he has aſſured to our obedience ſuch a happineſs, as both in kind and degree exceeds as well our conceptions as our utmoſt wiſhes.

If our fears can be awakened by the dread of evil, he has armed his laws with the terror of ſuch puniſhments, as by their weight and certainty cannot fail to alarm the diſobedient.

If

If our love can be won, and our devotion kindled by acts of kindneſs and beneficence, the amazing proofs of his love muſt ſurely be more than ſufficient, to affect us in the moſt powerful manner; and all theſe motives to obedience are propoſed to us under this expreſs aſſurance, that nothing but a ſincere and univerſal obedience to the commands of God, can give us an intereſt in the ſalvation he hath purchaſed for us, or in any degree entitle us to the divine favour: that not every one that ſaith unto him, Lord, Lord, ſhall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doth the will of his Father which is in heaven.

It is true indeed, that in the New Teſtament, faith is much and frequently inſiſted on, as the ground and foundation of our religion; and moſt juſtly, for how ſhall we obey the laws of any one in whom we do not believe? But faith itſelf can do us no good, unleſs it produce a life of virtue. For we read in the New Teſtament of ſome who believed, but did not obey the goſpel, or, in the words of the apoſtle, held the truth in unrighteouſneſs; but ſo far was their faith from profiting them, that the ſame apoſtle who deſcribes them declares their condemnation to be juſt.

And it is every-where the language of Chriſt and his apoſtles, that none who do not obey the

precepts ſhall inherit the promiſes of the goſpel; that to them only who by patient continuance in well-doing, ſeek for glory, honour, and immortality, God will give eternal life; but unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteouſneſs, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguiſh upon every ſoul of man that doth evil, whether Jew or Gentile; for there is no reſpect of perſons with God.

And as this is the uniform tenor of holy writ, ſo is it alſo moſt agreeable to reaſon and the nature of things.

Religion was not given us for God's ſake, but ours; not to benefit him, but to improve ourſelves; to teach us thoſe notions, and preſcribe to us that ſort of conduct, that will make us happy in ſociety with each other here, and prepare us for the enjoyment of God hereafter. Now certainly nothing can ſo effectually promote theſe great and valuable ends as a holy and virtuous life.

For with reſpect to this life, let us ſuppoſe a ſociety compoſed of none but vicious characters, ſuch as thieves, robbers, murderers, and oppreſſors, what happineſs or ſecurity could be expected in ſuch a neighbourhood? What pleaſure enjoyed in ſuch company? No property ſecure, no reputation ſafe, and even life itſelf in mutual danger,

either

either from the open aſſaults or ſecret machinations of a near neighbour or pretended friend.

Suppoſe the ſcene changed, and our ſociety formed of ſuch characters as the Phariſee in the goſpel, who faſted twice in the week, and gave tithes of all that he poſſeſſed, and highly valued himſelf upon the ſtrictneſs and punctuality he obſerved in theſe reſpects, without any mention of the weightier matters of the law, how much have we mended the matter? We have indeed got rid of profeſſed villainy and open barefaced wickedneſs; but to what purpoſe is this, if we are ſtill ſubject to the dark and hidden contrivances of the ſly and canting hypocrite, who (as our Saviour juſtly charges thoſe of his time) for a pretence makes long prayers, only in order with leſs ſuſpicion to ſpoil the helpleſs, and devour widows' houſes?

But let us now ſuppoſe a country, to be peopled with only ſuch inhabitants as fear God and keep his commandments. From ſuch amiable members no evil could ariſe to the community, and therefore ſuch a ſociety muſt be happy. Inſtead of the fears and evils incident to the ſtates already deſcribed, we ſhould behold every ingredient of human felicity, flowing from the uniform practice of univerſal holineſs and virtue. Inſtead of fear and diſtruſt and craft, we ſhould find mutual confidence,

dence, candour, and fair dealing; and fraud, violence, and rapine, would give place to that brotherly love and charity, which worketh no ill to his neighbour.

You ſee then that nothing but the real and ſincere practice of virtue can anſwer the ends of religion in this world. And as to the next life, we are ſure that God is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity with delight; and that no pretences to ſanctity can deceive the Searcher of hearts, nor any thing but purity and uprightneſs of heart and life, render us fit members of that bleſſed ſociety, into which nothing unclean ſhall enter; and therefore St. James gives it as the definition of true religion. Pure religion, and undefiled (ſays he) before God and the Father, is this, to viſit the fatherleſs and widow in their affliction, and to keep himſelf unſpotted from the world. In which words we may obſerve how judiciouſly the true nature and perfection of Chriſtian charity are ſtated; and how clearly it is ſhown to comprehend the whole of our duty to God, our neighbour, and ourſelves. For the ſanctity of life we owe to God, and the purity of manners which we owe to ourſelves, are here conſidered as inſeparable from the character of an accompliſhed Chriſtian; and all ideas of commutation, or making amends for the neglect of

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any duty by the regular practice of any other, are utterly renounced as irreconcileable with every proper notion of uniform and conſiſtent holineſs.

Nothing ſhort of that wiſdom which is from above will ever be accounted a wiſdom unto ſalvation: the properties of which wiſdom are, that *it is firſt pure, then peaceable, gentle and eaſy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocriſy:* ſuch, in ſhort, as hath its foundation in the love of God, its progreſs in a conſtant imitation of the example of Chriſt, and its perfection in the full exerciſe of mercy and benevolence towards men.

Upon the whole, my brethren, you ſee what true religion is: be not then ſatisfied with an empty and unprofitable name. You have ſeen, that under the various diſpenſations of the moſt diſtant ages it has been always the ſame. Learn then from thence to value and to practiſe that true and ſubſtantial holineſs without which you ſee it is impoſſible to be ſaved. And may God enable us all ſo to obey his will in this life, that in the life to come we may enjoy the fruits of our virtue to the honour and praiſe of his name, through Jeſus Chriſt our Lord.

SER-

SERMON XXIII.

[Preached on Good Friday.]

MARK xv. 23.

And it was the third hour; and they crucified him.

THE death and paſſion of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, and the * innumerable benefits which by his precious blood-ſhedding he hath beſtowed on us, are at all times objects proper for the devout and grateful meditation of a Chriſtian.

But the buſineſs of every day is too frequently deferred from one day to another, and that which may be done at any time is apt to be wholly neglected.

This is more particularly the caſe with the calls of religion, which are generally diſmiſſed, like St. Paul, with the promiſe of being heard at a more convenient ſeaſon. This being the caſe, the piety of our church hath appointed certain ſeaſons for recommending thoſe matters more particularly to our thoughts.

* Exhort. Com. Ser.

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The words I have now read to you from the goſpel, contain briefly the hiſtory of that memorable tranſaction, which the church has preſcribed as the proper ſubject of our contemplation at this holy ſeaſon; and particularly this day, we are called upon to deplore the moſt inhuman murder, the moſt barbarous tragedy, that ever diſgraced the annals of mankind.

The innocent and holy Jeſus numbered with the tranſgreſſors, ſeized by the tumult of an armed multitude as a malefactor, in the garden where he had retired to pray; betrayed by one, denied by another, and deſerted by all his ſervants, hurried away without mercy before a partial tribunal, and a cruel unjuſt judge, who, when no witneſs could be found whoſe evidence partiality itſelf could ſuſtain to accuſe him of any crime, at laſt condemned him for ſpeaking the truth! From thence turned over to a Roman governor, who, though he found upon examination that nothing could be juſtly laid to his charge, had neither the honeſty nor the courage to acquit him! Expoſed with all the mock pageantry of a robe of purple, a crown of thorns, and a ſceptre of reed, to the ſham homage of thoſe, who, not contented with the cruel inſult of bowing the knee before him in deriſion, proceeded to ſcourge, to ſmite, and ſpit upon him.

But

But all this was but a prelude to the bloody ſcene that filled up the meaſure of their wickedneſs.

Let us follow him through this laſt mournful ſtage of his ſuffering, and ſee and wonder, what the Lord hath done for us!

Behold the Son of God, led forth with formal indignity to the accurſed tree, expoſed to the gaze of a deluded rabble, the inſolence of heathen ſoldiers, the malice of Jewiſh rulers, and the unfeeling brutality of Roman executioners; ſee his body ſuſpended and fixed upon a croſs, with ſpikes of iron large enough to ſupport his weight; the brightneſs of God's glory given up to the rage of his blaſphemers; the prince of life expiring in agonies, amidſt the blaſphemous reproaches of his own creatures; the Lord of glory put to open ſhame, and the fountain of exiſtence yielding up the ghoſt!

It is impoſſible to hear or to read the hiſtory of this amazing fact without emotion. But let us, my brethren, collect our thoughts upon the mournful occaſion, and try to turn the awful tranſaction to account. In order to this, it will be proper to conſider,

I. The ends for which he condeſcended to ſuffer ſuch things: and,

II. The

II. The improvement we ought to make of this aſtoniſhing inſtance of divine love.

I. The prophet*, in the firſt leſſon for this evening's ſervice, after a minute and accurate deſcription of his perſon and character, declares that he was wounded for our tranſgreſſions, and bruiſed for our iniquities: and the apoſtle to Titus†, yet more plainly, that Chriſt gave himſelf for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himſelf a peculiar people, zealous of good works. From comparing theſe two texts together it appears, that the death of Chriſt was intended as a ſacrifice for ſin, which could not be pardoned, conſiſtently with the honour of God's government, without ſome ſatisfaction made to his juſtice; ſome atonement adequate to the mighty guilt meant to be expiated by it; ſuch as the honour of the party offended might, and his goodneſs would, accept, without derogating from the one or encroaching on the other. And as it was impoſſible for the offender to offer any thing to the Divine goodneſs, but what Divine juſtice muſt reject, and even reaſon diſapprove, God, ſtill more to magnify the glory of his goodneſs, in the midſt of deſerved wrath, remembered mercy, and ſent his own Son into the world to ſuffer, in our nature, the puniſhment due

* Iſaiah liii. 5. † Tit. ii. 14.

to our tranſgreſſions, and reconcile the ſtrict execution of juſtice upon ſin, with the brighteſt diſplay of mercy to the ſinner, thus verifying what he had revealed to his ſervant Abraham, in the figure that God * would provide himſelf a lamb for a ſacrifice.

I know there have been ſome perverſe ſpirits who have cavilled at the doctrine of ſalvation by a Redeemer. If God, ſay they, could ſave a guilty world by the death of an innocent perſon, why might he not as well have ſaved it without any ſuch ſacrifice? Now I confeſs that in the view of reaſon there is nothing to prevent an act of general indemnity to the whole world; but, in the name of common ſenſe, is human reaſon to be ſet up as a judge of the Divine conduct?

When the ſubjects of an earthly prince rebel againſt his authority, if he vouchſafe to liſten to their humble petitions, and grant them pardon, will he aſk them to dictate the terms upon which they will accept the favour, and return to their duty? And is it to be imagined that the Almighty Sovereign of the univerſe will ſubmit the wiſdom of his councils and the methods of his government to the deciſion of ſuch weak, ſhort-ſighted creatures as we are? eſpecially if it be conſidered, that

* Gen. xxii. 8.

when

when our Lord ſuffered for us, the whole human race were ſinners in the ſight of God, and moſt ungrateful rebels againſt his authority. Were they in ſuch a ſituation to preſcribe to their Maker, and ſay what was and was not fit for him to do?

Were we at all permitted to criticiſe the Divine diſpenſations, the faireſt inference would be this; that though human reaſon alone and unaſſiſted by revelation, may, and indeed frequently muſt, be at a loſs to account for the conduct of providence, yet as we are ſure that the whole is managed by infinite wiſdom and goodneſs, we may reſt ſatisfied that every deſign is perfectly wiſe and good; and ſince infinite power is always able to chuſe the means and inſtruments by which its own purpoſes ſhall be effected, we may be aſſured that God, in whom all perfections are united, will be always ſure to fix upon the beſt; but as we can neither ſee ſo clearly, nor conſequently judge ſo accurately, as He before whom all things are naked and open, our duty in all caſes is to acquieſce in what we cannot explain, and to receive with gratitude the good effects, without enquiring too critically into the reaſons of his diſpenſations.

Again, the death of Chriſt was intended not only as a ſacrifice for ſin, but a preſervative from it:

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to redeem us from all iniquity, from the power of ſin as well as the puniſhment due to it.

The efficacy of his death hath enabled him, if I may uſe the expreſſion, to command the gifts of the Holy Ghoſt, for the continual comfort, aſſiſtance, and ſupport of all true believers in him; to ſecure them from error, ſtrengthen them againſt temptation, and keep them from falling: to purify their hearts, and raiſe their affections above the mean and tranſitory purſuits of ſenſe, and enable them to perform ſuch true and laudable ſervice, as God for his ſake will both accept and reward with the bleſſing of eternal life.

Such are the merciful ends for which Chriſt came into the world, and did and ſuffered ſo great things during his reſidence upon earth; the pardon of our ſins, the reconciling us to God, and the ſalvation of our ſouls.

Let us ſee what effect this ought to have upon us, or, in other words, what uſe we ought to make of this aſtoniſhing inſtance of divine love; which was what I propoſed to conſider in the ſecond place.

Firſtly, The firſt thing that naturally occurs to our thoughts under this head, is to bleſs and praiſe the holy name of our God, for the love wherewith

wherewith he hath loved us, and the wonderful proof of his affection, which we are at this time called upon to commemorate.

When we conſider the vaſt diſtance between God and man, the infinite diſparity there is between the divine nature and our own, it muſt excite our utmoſt wonder to contemplate the great things he has done for us; and if our gratitude is not equal to our wonder, it muſt be becauſe we are ſtupid and inſenſible.

Had an angel, or being of ſuperior order, come as the meſſenger of God, to reclaim us from error, and teach us the will of our Creator, here would have been ſubject for reverence to his perſon, and thankfulneſs to God, for paying this attention to ſuch fallen guilty creatures as we are; but when we ſee the Son of God, his only Son, the Son of his love, by whom he made the worlds, and in whom he was well pleaſed; that Son, who was verily, and indeed God, of the ſubſtance of his Father, the brightneſs of his glory, and the expreſs image of his perſon; when we behold, I ſay, this glorious excellence, deſcending from the boſom of the Father, and not only taking upon him our nature, teaching us the will of God, and leading us in the road to happineſs, but ſuffering in his own perſon the puniſhment due to our offences, endur-

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ing ſuch ſeverity and indignity of treatment as were only inflicted on guilty ſlaves, that the ſacred truths he taught might make us free, and at laſt dying the moſt painful and ignominious death, that we through him might have life; what tongue can tell, what heart conceive, the greatneſs, the wonderful greatneſs of redeeming love?

Lord, what is man, that thou art thus mindful of him, or the Son of man, that thou haſt thus viſited him!

Glory, honour, and praiſe, be to thy name, O Father of mercies, for thy unſpeakable goodneſs manifeſted in our redemption: for now, to our eternal comfort we know and ſee, that thou haſt no pleaſure in the death of a ſinner, but rather that all ſhould repent and live; ſince thine ever-bleſſed Son was given, that all that believe on him ſhould not periſh, but have everlaſting life. And bleſſed for ever be thy name, O Holy Jeſu, who was contented to lay down thy precious life, that ſinners through thy death might live for ever.

Secondly, From hence we may learn the exceeding great malignity of ſin, ſince no ablution leſs than the blood of Chriſt was able to waſh out the dreadful ſtain it had made in the nature of man. And this as plainly points out to us,

Thirdly, This moſt comfortable aſſurance, that nothing

nothing ſhall be wanting to our ſalvation, if we are not wanting to ourſelves.

The Son of God being, as the ſcripture declares, the ſubject of his pleaſure and the object of his love, we cannot imagine it poſſible, that he ſhould part with him for our ſakes, and afterwards withhold from us any thing neceſſary to complete the value, or anſwer the end of that ineſtimable gift.

In all caſes we conclude with good reaſon, that he who actually gives much, cannot be unwilling to beſtow a little. Now the greateſt poſſible gift has been already beſtowed upon us, in the perſon of Jeſus Chriſt: we can therefore have no doubt of his willingneſs to add every neceſſary favour; ſince nothing can ſurpaſs or even equal what we have already received: to this purpoſe is the apoſtle's reaſoning to the Romans, chap. viii. 32. *He that ſpared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how ſhall he not with him alſo freely give us all things?*

Upon this it is natural to enquire in the fourth place, what manner of perſons ought we to be in all our converſation? If the love of God has been ſo far extended to us as to ſave us according to his mercy, ſurely common prudence requires us not wilfully to deſtroy ourſelves; and deſtroyed we muſt be, if we neglect the great ſalvation thus offered to us.

God

God has done all for us that could be done, and much more than could have been expected; and if we moſt obſtinately perſiſt in our own ruin, who or what but ourſelves can be to blame?

What then ſhall we ſay? What can we think? when we contemplate the mighty deliverance wrought for us by his blood, who, by overcoming the ſharpneſs of death, has opened unto us the gate of everlaſting life?

Let us retire from his houſe to our own, from the temple to the cloſet, and there meditate with grateful hearts, on the great, the unſpeakable mercy, which the ſervice of this day preſents to our view: and while we contemplate this wonderful inſtance of divine mercy, let us devoutly pray, that we may be enabled ſo to follow him in his death unto ſin, that we may become meet partakers in the glories of his reſurrection; that we may be admitted to join in the ſacred ſong of thoſe ten thouſand times ten thouſand and thouſand thouſand ſpirits who ſurround the throne of God, ſaying, **Worthy is the Lamb that was ſlain to receive power, and riches, and wiſdom, and ſtrength, and honour, and glory, and bleſſing; and therefore bleſſing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that ſitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb for ever and ever.* Amen.

* Rev. v. 12, 13.

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SERMON XXIV.

[Preached on Eaſter-Day.]

PSALM CXVIII. 24.

This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice, and be glad in it.

WHAT a happy change there is, my brethren, in the preſent occaſion of our meeting, from that which laſt called us to this ſacred place! from lamenting over bleeding innocence, in a deſpiſed, rejected, ſuffering Redeemer, to the joy and gladneſs of contemplating and adoring the glories of a riſen, victorious, and triumphant Lord! *This is that day which the Lord hath made.*

What then, ſays the fool, ſtill wiſe in his own conceit, hath the Lord made no other day but this? Did not the Lord create the light, and make all days alike for the uſe of his creatures? and can there be any day to him better than another?

Theſe are queſtions not uncommon in the mouths of thoſe, who, pretending to be the moſt perfect children of the Reformation, muſt needs accuſe us

of preſerving popiſh cuſtoms, becauſe we obſerve the great faſts and feſtivals which the apoſtles and their immediate ſucceſſors ordered to be kept in the church. But though we allow, with them, that any day, and all days, may with propriety be made holy to the Lord, nay that they actually are ſo, when we ſpend them as we ought, that is, partly in devotion, and partly in the proper buſineſs of our calling, or even in the innocent and healthful recreations of life, yet I think no unprejudiced perſon will deny, that ſome days are more proper for certain purpoſes than others: and when thoſe who have lawful authority for that purpoſe, have once ſettled the appointment, it is unbecoming to ſet up the judgment of private ſpirits, in ſuch matters, againſt the determination of national wiſdom.

It has been the glory of our church, to have departed from that of Rome, when ſhe became corrupt, and yet to have preſerved her moderation even in the midſt of the heats and convulſions, which ſuch a departure could not fail to occaſion, by cutting off only thoſe parts of doctrine and worſhip, that were either uſeleſs, or had been perverted by abuſe, and continuing whatever was to be found of primitive inſtitution and apoſtolic purity in that degenerate communion. Among others,

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the reverence ſhown from the firſt eſtabliſhment of Chriſtianity, to the great ſolemnities appointed for calling to mind the principal tranſactions of our Saviour's life while on earth, we are not aſhamed to own and to practiſe. Of theſe, none is more worthy of our attention, than the joyful occaſion of our Lord's reſurrection from the dead.

This is that joyful and glorious event which ſerved to confirm the faith of Chriſt's diſciples, to aſſure their hopes in him as the Redeemer of Iſrael, and to remove the doubts and ſcruples which had ariſen in their minds, upon ſeeing his cruel and ignominious death, and the apparent triumph of his enemies.

His doctrines and miracles had indeed prepared their minds to expect ſalvation from him, and they accordingly did * *truſt that it had been he which ſhould have redeemed Iſrael:* but it was reſerved for this ſtupendous diſplay of divine power to convince them of it, and to prove the certainty of all his promiſes to that effect.

The remembrance of this event was therefore deemed of ſuch mighty importance by the firſt Chriſtians, that the celebration of its anniverſary is among the oldeſt conſtitutions of which we read

* Luke xxiv. 21.

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in the hiſtory of the primitive church*: the reaſon of which will plainly appear from the following conſiderations.

1. *This is the day which the Lord hath made great*, by giving the moſt glorious proof of his own greatneſs; by riſing on it from the dead, by being born again of the womb of the earth, to prove himſelf God, as his firſt birth had proved him to be man.

2. *This is the day which the Lord hath made glorious*, by diſplaying the glory of his everlaſting kingdom, by taking poſſeſſion of eternal life in his own perſon, and thereby aſſuring the ſame precious bleſſing to them who by faith lay hold on his promiſes.

3. *This is the day which the Lord hath made a* day of *triumph* and *rejoicing*, by ſubduing all the moſt formidable enemies of human nature, robbing death of its ſting, the grave of its victory, ſpoiling

* The firſt account we have of it is from Polycarp's Journey to Anicetus the Roman biſhop, by reaſon of ſome diſputes that had ariſen about the time of celebrating Eaſter. It was a day of ſuch high ſolemnity in the primitive church, that all the clergy were bound, upon the pain of excommunication for three years, not to be abſent from their cures at that time. *Wright on the Com. Prayer on Eaſter.*

principalities

principalities and powers, triumphing over them, and making a ſhow of them openly: by flinging open the gates of death and hell, proclaiming * liberty to the captives, and the opening of the priſon to them that are bound.

4. *This is the day which the Lord hath made wonderful*, by turning diſhonour into honour, by converting the ignominy of his death into the glory of a reſurrection, the croſs on which he ſuffered into the trophy of his victory, the crown of thorns into a ray of glory, the reed in his hand into a ſceptre of righteouſneſs, the grave in which he lay buried into the gate of everlaſting life, and the mournful dirge of his funeral into ſongs of praiſe and ſalvation.

5. *This is the day which the Lord hath made comfortable* to all that mourn in Zion, to give unto them (as the prophet beautifully expreſſes it) *beauty for aſhes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praiſe for the ſpirit of heavineſs.*

To thoſe who had ſeen our Saviour in his lifetime, beheld his miracles, heard his doctrines, admired his wiſdom, and believed him to be the Chriſt the Son of God, the Meſſiah who was to be the Saviour of the world, and the reſtorer of the kingdom of Iſrael, to ſee him ſuſpended on the croſs,

* Iſa. lxi. 1.

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in the poſture, and ſuffering the puniſhment of a criminal ſlave (for free men were never crucified), muſt be a moſt humiliating and melancholy ſight. But the ſudden tranſition from ſorrow to joy, which the event of this day muſt give birth to, when he ſhowed himſelf alive and riſen, not the bloody conqueror of men's bodies, the tyrant of reluctant ſlaves, but the far more glorious victor over the powers of darkneſs, leading captivity captive, and according to his good pleaſure diſtributing gifts unto men; the joy, I ſay, which ſuch an event muſt excite, muſt be of that ſublime and ſolid kind, as to beggar all deſcription; a joy truly unſpeakable, and full of glory.

And laſtly, *This is the day which the Lord hath made peculiar to Chriſtians.*

Neither Jew nor Greek will diſpute with us the day of our Lord's nativity: the day of his crucifixion the enemies of his religion boaſted of; but this is the day, on which their ſhort-lived malice received a total diſgrace, by turning the matter of their boaſting into their ſhame, and their glorying into confuſion of face: **For now is Chriſt riſen from the dead:* and all the malice of his perſecutors, and all the dire effects of their unhallowed rage, ſerve only to enhance the glories of the victory he

* 1 Corinth. xv. 20.

hath

hath gotten by his croſs. That very inſtrument of his humiliation, the once accurſed tree, is become the moſt honourable badge of thoſe who fight under his banner; and the greateſt boaſt of his noble army of martyrs, apoſtles, and confeſſors, is to own and to preach Chriſt crucified—the power and the wiſdom of God.

Since then the day is ſo great, ſo glorious, ſo comfortable, ſo every way adapted to be a day of rejoicing and triumph, and even marked out by the hand of God as the grand feſtival of Chriſtians; let us, my brethren, follow the example of the royal Pſalmiſt in our text: let us rejoice, and be glad in it. Let us give glory and praiſe to God for the mighty deliverance he hath wrought for us, by ſending his ſon to die for our ſins, and riſe again for our juſtification; who now ſitteth at the right hand of the Majeſty on high, angels and authorities and powers being made ſubject unto him.

Again, let us rejoice, as indeed it well becomes us to be thankful, for the aſſurance he hath given us of our own reſurrection, by that of our bleſſed Lord.

I have not in this diſcourſe dwelt upon the proofs of this doctrine. Convinced as I am that I ſpeak only to thoſe who already believe it; to thoſe who profeſs the religion of Chriſt, that holy religion

gion by which life and immortality are brought to light, I cannot ſuppoſe it neceſſary, to inſiſt on that truth, which principally ſerves to diſtinguiſh us from the reſt of the world. For it is a fundamental article in the faith of a Chriſtian, that Chriſt aroſe from the dead; and the apoſtle to the * Romans plainly tells us, that he that raiſed up Chriſt from the dead, ſhall alſo quicken our mortal bodies by his Spirit, and again, to the † Corinthians, that as in Adam all die, even ſo in Chriſt ſhall all be made alive.

But, my brethren, there is more to be done than merely to aſſent to the truth of any doctrine, however important or however true. Chriſtianity is not merely a ſyſtem of ſpeculative notions, but requires practice as well as belief, from all its adherents. There is no doctrine of our religion but has a tendency to holineſs of life, nor will the moſt orthodox opinions avail us in the ſight of God, unleſs we are careful to maintain good works, and to live as becomes the goſpel.

The doctrine of the reſurrection of the body, for inſtance, naturally directs us to keep our bodies undefiled and pure, that they may be fit to preſent to the Lord, as objects of his mercy, and to enter into the glories of his everlaſting kingdom,

* Rom. viii. 11. † 1 Cor. xv. 22.

where

where we are aſſured that nothing unclean ſhall enter. And to this purpoſe St. Paul declares, that becauſe he had hope towards God, that there ſhould be a reſurrection of the dead, both of the juſt and the unjuſt, he therefore exerciſed himſelf to have always a conſcience void of offence towards God and towards man.

And certainly the conſideration of our being to live hereafter, and that our preſent life, which is but ſhort and tranſitory, is only a preparation for that which is to be unchangeable and everlaſting, if it were at all attended to, would prove the ſtrongeſt motive to our leading ſuch a life in this world, as we ſhall wiſh to have done when we come to enter on another.

Finally, my brethren, as we muſt be ſenſible that of ourſelves, and by our own ſtrength, we cannot walk in the commandments of God, nor ſerve him acceptably without his eſpecial grace, it becomes our indiſpenſable duty to uſe every method in our power for obtaining it, which he has preſcribed in his word.

One gracious opportunity of ſo doing, this day preſents itſelf to us all. We are called upon to commemorate the mercies of redeeming love, in the moſt ſolemn manner, by partaking of the ſymbols of his body and blood, to own him for our Saviour,

and profeſs our dependence on his merits. Need I perſuade you, Chriſtians, to embrace this joyful occaſion of eating and drinking at the table of your Lord; of acknowledging your obligations to this your beſt and greateſt friend, and renewing your allegiance to the Lord that bought you at ſo high a price? I am unwilling to ſuppoſe it needful. You know the bleſſings with which Chriſt has promiſed to bleſs the regular uſe of his own appointed ordinances: ye know that when two or three are gathered together in his name, he is there in the midſt of them, to bleſs them, and to grant their requeſts. O may he meet you this day in mercy! may he be with you and among you in every act of your devotion, and ſtrengthen you in every good word and work, to the glory of his holy name, who liveth and reigneth with the Father and the Holy Ghoſt ever, one God world without end. Amen.

SER-

SERMON XXV.

[Preached on the Sunday after Aſcenſion-Day.]

EPHES. iv. 8.

When he aſcended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.

FROM the conſideration of the ſufferings and death of our dear Redeemer, and his victory over all the enemies of our ſalvation, by his wonderful reſurrection from the dead, the church now invites us to celebrate the glory of his triumphant aſcenſion into heaven, and entry on his immortal office of king and head over all things to us his ſubjects and followers; diſpenſing, as a gracious ſovereign, gifts to his people, according to his own will and their neceſſities. *When he aſcended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.*

This expreſſion of leading captivity captive, is taken from Pſalm lxviii. 18. which is evidently a prediction of our Lord's aſcenſion, and ſo applied by the apoſtle in the text.

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The ſame expreſſion occurs in the book of Judges, chap. v. 12. *Ariſe, Barak, lead thy captivity captive.* In this place, the meaning of the phraſe plainly is, Lead captive thoſe by whom thou wert before held in bondage.

Barak was now to triumph over Siſera, captain of the hoſt of Jabin king of Canaan, into whoſe hands we are told the Lord hath ſold the Iſraelites; and therefore this triumph was to be expreſſive of liberty recovered from oppreſſion: but, in application to our Saviour, no ſuch thing could take place. He who is the Author of liberty and life eternal, could not himſelf be held in bondage of any; and, therefore, it is not ſaid of him, "thou "haſt led *thy* captivity captive," but, "thou haſt led captivity captive:" *i. e.* thou haſt led captive thoſe who before exerciſed tyranny over others. Theſe were the devil and his angels, thoſe wicked ſpirits by whom the world was held in bondage, and by whom the wicked are taken captive at will.

By the death of Chriſt, thoſe enemies were ſubdued; his reſurrection completed the conqueſt; but the glorious diſplay of his triumph was reſerved till forty days after the battle was over; when he took poſſeſſion of the heavenly kingdom, the meed of all his merits and his labours.

This

This was the laſt and crowning act of his miniſtry on earth, and began the exerciſe of his regal office and power in heaven.

The hiſtory of this wonderful tranſaction is recorded in the firſt chapter of the Acts of the Apoſtles; where we read, that Chriſt, after his paſſion, ſhowed himſelf alive to his diſciples * *by many infallible proofs, being ſeen of them forty days, and ſpeaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.* And as at the end of this time he was aſſembled with them, while they ſtedfaſtly looked on him, he was taken up, and a cloud received him out of their ſight.

Whither he went they could not tell, any farther than their ſight would carry them; but to ſatisfy them in this, they had the divine teſtimony; for, † *while they looked ſtedfaſtly toward heaven as he went up, behold two men ſtood by them in white apparel; which alſo ſaid, Ye men of Galilee, why ſtand ye gazing up into heaven? This ſame Jeſus, which is taken up from you into heaven, ſhall ſo come in like manner as ye have ſeen him go into heaven.*

Theſe two men were none of their company; and the manner in which they are introduced by the ſacred hiſtorian, ſhows their appearance to be extraordinary and miraculous; ſo that the apoſtles

* Ver. 3 † Ver. 10, 11.

had

had the evidence of their own eyes, as far as that could ſerve, and, where that failed, the evidence of a miracle to convince them, that in the ſame body in which Chriſt converſed with them on earth, in that ſame body he was carried up into heaven.

This event anſwered to the great lines of our Saviour's character. He was ordained to be the judge of quick and dead, and the time of judgment was not yet come.

The laſt judgment is to be the judgment of mankind by the goſpel, and therefore it was neceſſary that the goſpel ſhould be publiſhed through the world; which was accordingly done ſoon after his aſcenſion, as the apoſtle Paul * has told us: and as it was not proper that Chriſt ſhould always continue upon earth, but leave the goſpel to its natural and proper operations; where ſhould he go in the mean time, but to heaven, from whence he came, and where he was with the Father from all eternity? And as it was determined by the wiſdom of God, that he ſhould judge the world in that ſame nature in which he ſaved the world; therefore in that ſame nature, ſoul and body, he went up alive, and is ſet down at the right hand of God, inveſted with power, majeſty and glory,

* Rom. x. 18. Coloſſ. i. 6. 23.

where

where he ever liveth to make * interceſſion for his people.

Again, when our Lord aſcended up on high, he gave gifts unto men. The Pſalmiſt ſays, *Thou haſt received gifts for men:* which exactly comes to the ſame thing: for what he gave, that he received of the Father. Theſe gifts were the gifts of the Holy Ghoſt, to be diſtributed in their various kinds to his ſervants, for the uſe of the church, as it follows in this ſame chapter: † *And he gave ſome apoſtles, and ſome prophets, and ſome evangeliſts, and ſome paſtors and teachers; for the perfecting of the ſaints, for the work of the miniſtry, for the edifying of the body of Chriſt, till we all come in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the meaſure of the ſtature of the fulneſs of Chriſt.*

Hence then we may ſee the connexion there is, between the aſcenſion of Chriſt and the diſpenſing the gifts of the Holy Ghoſt; for the one is the ground and efficient cauſe of the other. For (ſays he to his apoſtles) ‡ *I tell you the truth. It is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away, the comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will ſend him unto you.* The Holy Ghoſt was not

* Heb vii. 25. † Ver. 11, 12, 13.
‡ John xvi. 7.

to

to be given, (as * St. John intimates) till Chriſt was glorified, and that could not be till he aſcended into heaven, and took poſſeſſion of the throne of his kingdom. This was the time, when the preſence of the comforter was neceſſary.

While our Lord continued with his diſciples, they wanted no comforter but himſelf; but when he was removed from them, the gifts of the Holy Ghoſt became needful, to qualify them for the work to which they were appointed, *viz.* to publiſh the goſpel to all mankind: for ſo runs their commiſſion: † *Go ye into all the world, and preach the goſpel to every creature.*

The apoſtles were preachers of the goſpel to the Jews, aſſociated with their maſter himſelf, during his miniſtry upon earth; but after his aſcenſion they were to go into all the world, and preach the goſpel to every creature. It would have been hard to have thus increaſed their labour, and at the ſame time leſſened their abilities, by depriving them of that aſſiſtance they had been poſſeſſed of before; which yet would have been the caſe, if no proviſion had been made to ſupply his abſence: but for this purpoſe the Holy Ghoſt was ſent to be their guide and inſtructor. For thus he is promiſed in the 14th chapter of St. John, v. 16. *I will pray*

* John vii. 39. † Mark xvi. 15.

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the Father, and he ſhall give you another comforter, that he may abide with you for ever, even the Spirit of truth. And again v. 26. of the ſame chapter: *The comforter which is the Holy Ghoſt, whom the Father will ſend in my name, he ſhall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatſoever I have ſaid unto you.*

That the promiſe of the Holy Ghoſt was relative to the appointment of the apoſtles to the great work of preaching the goſpel throughout the world, we learn from Acts i. 4. where we are told, that Chriſt directed them not to depart from Jeruſalem, but wait for the promiſe of the Father, which (ſays he) *ye have heard of me. For John truly baptiſed with water, but ye ſhall be baptized with the Holy Ghoſt not many days hence:* and from what follows at the 8th v. *But ye ſhall receive power after that the Holy Ghoſt is come upon you; and ye ſhall be witneſſes unto me both in Jeruſalem and in Judea, and in all Samaria, and unto the uttermoſt part of the earth.*

They were to go from Jeruſalem into all the world; but they were firſt to wait for the promiſe of the Father. They were to be witneſſes unto Chriſt in all nations of the earth; but not till they had received power by the Holy Ghoſt coming upon them.

This power in the apoſtles appeared in ſeveral ways; firſt, in ſpeaking in various languages, which they had never learned or ſtudied; in healing the ſick and lame; raiſing the dead to life; and above all, in conveying to others a portion of the ſame divine inſpiration with which themſelves were endued: all which was for confirmation of their teſtimony, and to ſhow that their authority was from God, who alone is able to confer ſuch gifts.

This promiſe being purely relative to the firſt propagation of the goſpel, no claim of extraordinary or miraculous gifts can be founded upon it in after times, when the ends of providence in this firſt publication ſhould be ſufficiently anſwered. God may undoubtedly work miracles by the miniſtration of whom he will, and when he pleaſes; but ſhould he do ſo now, it would not be in conſequence of the promiſe made to the apoſtles, but by virtue of his own ſovereign authority, by which he may diſpenſe his gifts according to the purpoſes of his own will. Chriſt has indeed promiſed elſewhere to the apoſtles, and in them to the church, his perpetual preſence. *Lo! I am with you alway, even to the end of the world*, Matth. xxviii. 20. But the nature of his preſence muſt be ſuch as the ſtate of his church rendered neceſſary: *i. e.* by extraordinary exertions of his power, while

thoſe

thoſe were neceſſary, but when that neceſſity ceaſed, by the ordinary means of grace, left in charge with ſuch miniſters of the goſpel, as ſhould be lawfully appointed to ſucceed to the firſt propagators of it.

Before the goſpel was publiſhed, and the ſcriptures of the New Teſtament were written, theſe extraordinary demonſtrations of the divine authority were neceſſary, to ſhow that the apoſtles were endued with power from on high: but now that the ſcriptures are completed, and we have them in our hands, we are commanded to ſearch them for the words of eternal life; and required to exerciſe ſuch a rational faith as the proofs of religion contained in them are fitted to produce, and regulate our lives by the precepts of Chriſt and his apoſtles, which we there find recorded. To this we are encouraged by the aſſurance he has given us, that ſuch aids of the Holy Spirit as ſhall be needful to faith and a good life, ſhall never be denied to them that aſk them. But we muſt not expect that God will be always working miracles, for the converſion of thoſe who have already ſufficient proof in their hands.

When the rich man in the parable requeſted Lazarus to be ſent to his brethren, his argument was, that if one were ſent to them from the dead,

they

they would repent. But if the want of ſuch a meſſenger was any excuſe for their impenitence, it can be none for ours: for we have not only Moſes and the prophets as they had, we have alſo Chriſt and his apoſtles. Nay we have alſo Jeſus Chriſt himſelf, riſen from the dead, and triumphantly paſſed into heaven, a glorious and immortal proof of all he taught as fit to be believed and practiſed by thoſe who wiſh to follow him to eternal life. And do we yet want proofs to confirm us in the truth of our holy religion? Do we require yet more miracles, to lead us to repentance? This were folly inexcuſable, becauſe proceeding from obſtinacy irreclaimable.

You ſee then the nature of Chriſt's continual preſence with his church, and that it is ſufficient for promoting the end of his religion, *viz.* eſtabiſhing the faith and a good life: ſuch a life as will prepare us for the enjoyment of heaven hereafter. This is abſolutely neceſſary to our ſalvation, and upon no other condition is that bleſſing promiſed to us.

Chriſt, it is true, has by his precious blood-ſhedding purchaſed for us the means and hope of ſalvation. Through him we have the promiſe of remiſſion of ſins and eternal life. For * *when*

* Iſa. lxiii. 5.

there

there was none to help, nor any to uphold, then his own arm brought ſalvation. In this work, therefore, he has no partner; for he, and he alone, is the Redeemer of Iſrael; neither is there any other name given unto men whereby they can be ſaved. But as the purchaſe of our peace is altogether his, ſo he has reſerved to himſelf the right to diſpenſe the bleſſing upon his own terms. Thoſe terms are faith and repentance, without which he is not bound by any promiſe to ſave us. We muſt mortify the deeds of the body; we muſt crucify the fleſh, with its affections and luſts; in a word we muſt obey, as well as believe in the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, if we expect to be ſaved through his merits, and the covenant of grace which he has eſtabliſhed.

I know there are not wanting in the world, thoſe who would perſuade us, that the redemption purchaſed for us by Chriſt is ſo complete, as to have left nothing for us to do; and that when we come to him, we muſt carry nothing with us but our ſins, to be taken away by him, that we may receive newneſs of life from him, as a free and unmerited gift, and be as unactive in our ſpiritual, as we were in our natural birth. But ſuch enthuſiaſts deſerve no credit, becauſe their pernicious doctrine is diametrically oppoſite and contrary to the

words

words of our Saviour himſelf, who ſurely muſt know the terms on which he has offered ſalvation, better than theſe ſelf-conceited expounders of his meaning.

To prove this, let us hear the words of Chriſt himſelf, ſpoken in plain and unequivocal language, and ſuch as cannot be miſunderſtood. Matth. v. 16. *Let your light ſo ſhine before men, that they may ſee your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.* And again, v. 20. *I ſay unto you, that except your righteouſneſs ſhall exceed the righteouſneſs of the Scribes and Phariſees, ye ſhall in no caſe enter into the kingdom of heaven.* Again, John xv. 8. *Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit, ſo ſhall ye be my diſciples.*

The writings of the apoſtles, who of all mortals beſt knew the will of their divine Maſter, are full of the ſame doctrine, exhorting us to perfect holineſs in the fear of God. * *To be ſtedfaſt and immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord:* and this for the beſt of all reaſons; *becauſe we know that our labour ſhall not be in vain in the Lord*; that *God is not unrighteous to forget our work and labour of love;* and that † *without holineſs no man ſhall ſee the Lord.* In ſhort, when we bring

* 2 Corinth. vii. 1. † 1 Corinth. xv. 58.

our

our ſins to Chriſt, we muſt bring our repentance alſo; for he has plainly told us, that notwithſtanding all he has done and ſuffered for us, * unleſs we repent we ſhall periſh.

* Luke xiii. 3, 5.

SERMON XXVI.

[Preached on Whitſunday.]

JOHN xvi. 8, 9, 10, 11.

And when he is come, he will reprove the world of ſin, and of righteouſneſs, and of judgment. Of ſin, becauſe they believe not on me: of righteouſneſs, becauſe I go to my Father, and ye ſee me no more: of judgment, becauſe the Prince of this world is judged.

THAT our Lord Jeſus Chriſt was a teacher ſent from God, was fully evident by his life, doctrine, and miracles. That he was the Meſſias foretold by the prophets, was no leſs manifeſt from his death and reſurrection; by which their predictions concerning him were literally fulfilled. That he was of an order ſuperior to humanity, might fairly be concluded, from his triumphant aſcenſion into heaven. But that he was actually God, the ſame in ſubſtance and equal in glory with the Father, was reſerved to be proved by the

ſtupendous

ſtupendous act of divine power exhibited on the day of Pentecoſt; the memory of which, the church has wiſely ordered to be kept up, by the annual celebration of that day, to the end of the world, namely, the effuſion of the Holy Spirit upon the diſciples at Jeruſalem. This was the full and final confirmation of Chriſt's religion; the act which confirmed the myſtery of redemption; the laſt ſeal affixed to the charter of ſalvation.

It is true, that, previous to this, our Saviour had collected together a ſmall number of faithful adherents, who were contented to abide with him in all his temptations, and follow him even when he had not where to lay his head: but he could not be ſaid to have founded a church upon earth, till he had ſent the Holy Ghoſt to his diſciples, to encourage and qualify them for the great work to which they were appointed—the publication of the goſpel to all mankind.

The goſpel had hitherto been ſhut up in dark and parabolical ſpeeches; nor were they as yet able to explain, or even to underſtand, doctrines couched in ſuch an alluſive and allegorical ſtyle.

Till then, their notions of the intention of Chriſt's coming into the world were obſcure, and betrayed great ignorance; their apprehenſion of

the nature and conſtitution of his kingdom falſe and frivolous. They neither knew what form of faith to profeſs, nor dared to profeſs any form publicly. Their religious meetings were in private; and their only hope and proſpect was, that by waiting at Jeruſalem, they ſhould receive the Comforter, whom their Maſter had promiſed to ſend for their preſent relief, and future guidance and direction; and even of him their notions were but vague and obſcure. The firſt intention therefore of ſending the Holy Ghoſt, was to make up theſe deficiences; to enlighten their minds with the knowledge of Chriſt's religion, of which their notions ſeem to have been very imperfect; to correct their ignorance, reform their errors, and lead them into all truth, and bring to their remembrance all thoſe things in which they had been formerly inſtructed by their Lord, and which they had either forgotten or miſunderſtood.

But, beſides this, the office of the Holy Ghoſt extended farther; he was not only to enlighten, and thereby to ſanctify and make holy the elect of God, but he was alſo to reprove the world, and that in three inſtances particularly ſpecified, *viz.* ſin, righteouſneſs, and judgment.

Let us then, firſt, aſcertain the ſenſe of the words;

words; and, ſecondly, enquire in what reſpects theſe promiſed effects of the miſſion of the Holy Ghoſt were performed.

As to the firſt, it is to be obſerved, that the word in the text* which is rendered *reprove*, ſhould have been tranſlated *confute* or *convince:* it is a term derived from legal proceedings in courts of juſtice, and is taken for the office of a council or advocate, which is, to make good the cauſe of his client or employer, by arguments or evidence fit to confute the adverſary, and convince the court, or judge, before whom the cauſe is tried. And thus the Holy Ghoſt by his coming pleaded the cauſe of Chriſt upon earth, by convincing the world of ſin, becauſe they believed not in Chriſt.

By the world, we are here particularly to underſtand the Jews, to whom alone the goſpel had hitherto been offered. Their unbelief might in ſome meaſure be palliated, by their ignorance of the dignity of the perſon by whom it was revealed; as himſelf pleaded for them when hanging on the croſs, ſaying, *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.* But when, by the miſſion of the Holy Ghoſt, he had ſo clearly and ſo publicly manifeſted the divinity of his nature, in the powerful operations thereby exhibited, their reſiſtance of

* Ελεγξει.

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ſuch wonderful, ſuch manifold proofs as were then offered, could only proceed from an unpardonable perverſeneſs and obſtinacy.

The character of a true prophet is always to be diſtinguiſhed by the accompliſhment of his predictions. Chriſt, therefore, having foretold that he would ſend the Holy Ghoſt upon his apoſtles, the accompliſhment of that prophecy ought to have convinced them of the truth of his doctrine; and as it had not that effect, it clearly convicted them of ſin.

The ſecond point of which the Holy Ghoſt was to reprove or convince the world was, righteouſneſs; becauſe (ſays Chriſt in the text), *I go to my Father, and ye ſee me no more.*

The juſtice of God certainly requires, and his word has declared, that a final difference ſhall be made between vice and virtue: that while the former is puniſhed by the ſeverity of his juſtice, the latter ſhall experience the clemency of divine mercy. But in the inſtance now before us, there was a cloud hung over the divine adminiſtration, which, to the eyes of men, ſeemed to darken the brightneſs of his glory.

The Son of God had lived a life of the moſt perfect innocence upon earth; had ſpent the whole of his time in acts of piety towards God, and beneficence

ficence to men; notwithſtanding which, he was continually expoſed to the contradiction of ſinners, the inſults of his enemies, the rage of his perſecutors, and the cruelty of his murderers. And though the ſhort-lived triumph of thoſe who had procured his crucifixion, received a complete overthrow on the third day, when he aroſe from the dead, yet the abſurd ſtory which they had propagated, by having corrupted the ſoldiers who guarded his tomb, had excited in the public no ſmall doubt reſpecting his perſon and character. If glory, honour, and immortality, then, be the reward of a patient continuance in well-doing (as we are well authoriſed to ſay it is), ſurely he whoſe whole life was but one ſeries of the moſt exalted virtue, might well expect to poſſeſs the higheſt degree of thoſe ineſtimable bleſſings.

To vindicate the juſtice of God, therefore, in this particular; that ſin might no longer triumph, nor infidelity find an excuſe from the ſeeming neglect of ſuch indubitable merit; God exalted his Son to his own right hand in heaven, crowned him with glory and honour, put all enemies under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to his church.

To publiſh this to the world, the Holy Ghoſt was ſent, who proved by his gifts ſhed abroad as

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on this day, that the Son of God was not unrewarded for his labours; that he was now aſcended up on high, far out of the reach of his enemies, and inveſted with ſovereign power and dominion, able to protect and enlarge his church, and puniſh all thoſe daring rebels who would not that he ſhould rule over them; that his former ſufferings were not more ſevere than his reward was glorious; that if it pleaſed God to withdraw in appearance his favour and protection from his human nature, he had now, in recompence, advanced him in that very nature to an eternal crown of glory, and placed him on the right hand of the Majeſty on high. And thus the gifts of the Holy Ghoſt were fitted to convince the world, that eternal and immutable righteouſneſs is an eſſential attribute of God.

The third and laſt thing, of which the Comforter was to reprove or convince the world, was of judgment; and that becauſe the Prince of the world is judged.

Natural as well as revealed religion teaches, that God is the ſupreme judge of all the creation: but the devil, who is frequently in ſcripture called the prince of this world, had for many ages exerciſed a ſort of tyranny upon earth. He had withdrawn the far greater part of mankind from their allegiance to God, and filled the nations with idols

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and oracles of his own contrivance; he had procured the worſhip of himſelf, to become the prevailing religion of all nations, except the Jews; and even them he had often ſeduced to idolatry and diſobedience to the divine commands; and had now inſtigated them to imbrue their hands in the blood of their own Meſſiah.

All theſe enormous crimes, his continued rebellion againſt God, and particularly this laſt and greateſt, his attempt to thwart the providence of God by procuring the death of Chriſt, did require from the Judge of all the earth, a ſevere puniſhment.

This puniſhment is in our text called by the name of judgment, becauſe a ſentence proceeding from the rules of equity and juſtice. This ſentence was to be executed under the goſpel of Chriſt, as we are told in this goſpel, xii. 31. *Now is the judgment of this world; now ſhall the prince of this world be caſt out.* The execution of it was to be performed by the preaching of the goſpel, which ſhould defeat the power of the devil, overthrow his kingdom, lead men from darkneſs into light, and from the power of ſatan to ſerve the living God.

From the bleſſings of this day it was, that the apoſtles received abilities and courage, to preach and

and publiſh the goſpel to the utmoſt parts of the earth; to beat down the ſtrong holds of ſin, ruin the power of the devil, and turn men to the knowledge and obedience of God. By the continuation of theſe bleſſings, the church has been always defended from the ſecret and open aſſaults of thoſe infernal ſpirits; the governors and miniſters of the church have been enabled to maintain and preach the truth, and diſcharge their office with ſucceſs; and all the members of the church have been eſtabliſhed in their faith, and ſupported againſt all the temptations of thoſe wicked ſpirits. So eminently did God upon this day execute judgment upon the prince of this world, that from thenceforward his kingdom continually decreaſed, his oracles were put to ſilence, his altars abandoned, his worſhip forſaken, his diſciples diminiſhed, and a glorious church eſtabliſhed upon earth; which, by her ſolemn baptiſmal engagement, vows eternal enmity to him and all his works.

In all theſe particulars, did the Holy Ghoſt, as a faithful advocate, at his firſt miſſion plead the cauſe of Chriſt upon earth, in oppoſition to all his adverſaries: and in the ſame reſpects does that bleſſed ſpirit, who was promiſed to remain with the church for ever, and execute the paracletic office till the conſummation of all things, ſtill continue,

tinue to plead the cauſe of Chriſt in the world againſt his enemies; and that he ſhould do ſo is highly requiſite. For the devil ſtill aſſaults the church, either by open force or ſecret temptations. Infidels and heretics ſtill profeſs to deny his doctrines: and even in the boſom of the church, and among thoſe who take to themſelves the honour of being called by the holy name of Chriſt, how many are there to be found, againſt whom it is neceſſary that the Holy Spirit ſhould ſtill plead his cauſe; which they diſcredit by their ſins, and blaſpheme by their lives, crucifying afreſh the Lord of life, and putting him to open ſhame. Againſt all theſe, I ſay, the Holy Spirit ſtill pleads the cauſe of Chriſt, by oppoſing to them his gifts and graces; the ſame arguments which were manifeſted to proceed from his firſt miſſion: for they ſtill continue in full force.

We do not now, indeed, receive thoſe miraculous gifts with which the apoſtles and firſt converts to Chriſtianity were endued, nor is it neceſſary that we ſhould. All that is needful, all that is convenient for us, we ſtill have. The Holy Ghoſt continues to diffuſe his ineſtimable benefits to the ſouls of God's people: he excites them by inward godly motions, confirms them by his aſſiſtance, perfects them by his graces, and inſpires them with

faith and hope and joy in believing. And leſt we ſhould ſtill doubt his continuing to beſtow theſe bleſſings on us, for want of ſome external aſſurance, our Lord has inſtituted the holy ſacraments, eſpecially that of his laſt ſupper, as viſible pledges of his diſtribution of grace to all faithful believers in him: hereby confirming to the members of his church all the benefits of the Holy Spirit neceſſary to ſalvation, as certainly as when he formerly deſcended on the apoſtles with ſigns and miracles, the gift of tongues, and cure of diſeaſes.

Theſe miraculous powers are no way neceſſary to ſalvation: for we are told that one may poſſeſs them all, and yet at laſt be no better than a caſtaway: but he, who by a ſincere repentance and lively faith, reconciles himſelf to Chriſt his head, and exerciſes an unfeigned charity to all his fellow-members, cannot fail of obtaining his deſired end, the ſalvation of his ſoul: which may God of his infinite mercy grant to us all, through Jeſus Chriſt our Lord. Amen.

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SERMON XXVII.

[Preached on Trinity Sunday.]

JOB xi. 7.

Canſt thou by ſearching find out God? Canſt thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?

THERE is a calumny raiſed againſt the goſpel by its enemies, and but too much countenanced by ſome of its pretended friends, that it contains doctrines inconſiſtent with reaſon, and to which therefore no rational mind can give aſſent. Theſe detractors think they have the ſtrongeſt argument for their opinion, in the doctrine of the ever bleſſed trinity, which all true Chriſtians hold as a fundamental article of faith, and which the church has for many * ages ordered to be particularly

* This feſtival is not of ſuch ancient appointment as the others that are ordered to be obſerved through the courſe of the year. The authors of the ancient Liturgies, having directed that the praiſes of the holy Trinity ſhould be celebrated in the doxologies, hymns, creeds, and benedictions, did not think it neceſſary to appoint a particular day for the celebration

cularly celebrated on this day; but which theſe ſcoffers ſcruple not to brand with the odious appellation of an abſurdity.

I do not mean to enter the liſts with thoſe men upon the metaphyſical principles on which ſome pious and well-meaning divines have taken up the argument: becauſe, however concluſive they may be to minds accuſtomed to ſuch diſcuſſions, I conſider them not ſo well adapted to a popular aſſembly, as what I mean now to ſay in plain and ſimple language, in ſupport of the true Chriſtian doctrine, with reſpect to this important article of faith.

In the firſt place then, I deſire only to be allow-

bration of a myſtery, which made a part of the ſervice of every day. But when the Arian hereſy had ſpread abroad, and the principles of that ſect had obtained over a great part of Europe and the eaſt, it was judged neceſſary by the orthodox, to make this myſtery the ſubject of one day's ſolemn meditation: and true believers were expected to diſtinguiſh themſelves from thoſe heretics, by the punctual obſervation of it. The church, therefore, having ſolemnized in their regular order, the paſſion, reſurrection, and aſcenſion of our Lord, and the deſcent of the Holy Ghoſt upon the apoſtles, on the day of Pentecoſt, thought it ſeaſonable to conclude thoſe great ſolemnities with this feſtival. Accordingly the obſervation of it was enjoined by the council of Arles in the year of our Lord 1260. And to avoid the ſuſpicion of Arianiſm or hereſy, of which our adverſaries of the church of Rome might be apt to accuſe us, our reformers have thought fit to retain it in the ſame order of time as it was firſt appointed.

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ed this principle, which I think no reaſonable man will deny; that God is a pure and divine Spirit, infinite in his exiſtence, as well as in all the perfections of his nature.

That he does exiſt, I truſt I need not in this audience ſtay to prove*; but of the manner of his exiſtence we can know nothing, except what he is pleaſed to reveal to us; and even of that, little can be comprehended beyond what more immediately regards ourſelves. We have, for example, ſome idea of perfect juſtice; and we can form ſome notion of this attribute, coupled with diffuſive goodneſs and mercy: but of the nature of a pure and incorporeal ſpirit, we have in fact no adequate conception: and whoever would pretend to explain it to us, would only ſpend his time like one talking to the deaf. For this reaſon it is, that whatever we are told in ſcripture reſpecting it, is couched in ſuch general terms as do not amount to any particular or definite deſcription. That a ſpirit is immortal, inviſible, and the like, we are

* We are told by the Pſalmiſt, of one who ſaid in his heart that there is no God; but it was only the fool who ſaid ſo: and in truth we may conclude that none but a fool would have ſaid it. The attempts which we have ſeen made to prove a negative ſo completely impious and abſurd, by rational argument and logical deduction, ſerve only to ſhow, that there are monſters in the rational as well as in the natural world.

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informed: but theſe are all negative terms; and as no other are uſed in ſpeaking on the ſubject of ſpirits, we may fairly conclude, that nothing poſitive can be aſſerted of a ſpirit, in language ſuited to our conceptions.

And hence we may reaſonably infer, that there are many things true concerning the world of ſpirits, into which it is not the will of our Creator that we ſhould penetrate, in the preſent ſtate of our being.

But if this be true of the nature of ſpirits in general, how much more muſt it be ſo with reſpect to God, who is on all hands allowed to be infinite, and therefore wholly incomprehenſible to every thing finite? The queſtion of Zophar, in the text, ſtrongly implies the general ſenſe of mankind on the ſubject; and that the moſt diligent inquiry, of the moſt ſagacious created mind, muſt come infinitely ſhort of a perfect acquaintance with the ſubject.

But the adverſaries of our faith have the effrontery to charge us with abſurdity, as if we aſſerted, in the doctrine of the trinity, that three, numerically conſidered, were but one, and one made three. But in fact we aſſert no ſuch thing. We know it is contrary to reaſon to ſuppoſe that there are or can be more Gods than one. Revelation

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ſays the ſame thing: * *The Lord our God is one Lord:* yet we know that Chriſt commiſſioned his apoſtles to baptize all nations in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghoſt; and as it would argue a ſpecies of idolatry to baptize them in any name but that of God, we have good reaſon to conclude that Father, Son, and Holy Ghoſt, are one God. And for this we have better authority in that ſingle appointment of our Saviour, even ſuppoſing we had no other, than our adverſaries can give us againſt it, by a thouſand ſophiſtical arguments, and as many ſceptical difficulties, raiſed by the utmoſt ſtretch of human cunning and ſagacity. Accordingly our venerable and truly Chriſtian church, has adopted the doctrine fully in the firſt article of her faith, where it is expreſſed in words ſo plain and diſtinct, that no man of common underſtanding can be at a loſs for the meaning of them: the words are theſe, "There is but one living and true God, everlaſting, "without body, parts, or paſſions; of infinite "power, wiſdom, and goodneſs, the maker and "preſerver of all things, both viſible and inviſible: "and in unity of this Godhead there be three per-"ſons, of one ſubſtance, power, and eternity; the "Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghoſt."

* Deut. vi. 4.

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We call them Perſons, becauſe we have no better term whereby to expreſs ourſelves concerning them; but if by the word Perſon we meant to convey ſuch a difference as ſerves to diſtinguiſh one of our own ſpecies from another, we ſhould be far from the truth; for they are not three, but one God.

That this great truth is revealed to us in ſcripture, without proof or explanation, is, becauſe it could not otherwiſe be received by ſuch faculties as we poſſeſs. It is impoſſible that any finite mind ſhould fully comprehend that which is infinite. It is a truth capable of demonſtration, that the leſſer cannot contain the greater; ſooner therefore may a bucket contain the ocean, than man by ſearching find out the Almighty to perfection.

Our Saviour, in his converſation with Nicodemus, puts this emphatical queſtion to him: If I tell you of earthly things, and ye believe not, how ſhall ye believe if I tell you of heavenly things? If my account of the wind, which is known to all the world by its effects, be ſo difficult to underſtand, how can you underſtand, or how could you believe me, were I to tell you of the nature of God, and other celeſtial beings; the manner of his exiſtence, the perſonal union and equality of the Trinity, and other heavenly things which you have neither

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language to expreſs, nor capacities to comprehend? Theſe are divine myſteries, revealed to us by the authority of God's word; and on his word we muſt rely for the truth of them, without pretending to ſcan what is above our reach, or attempting to be wiſe above what is written.

But though we are not qualified by our nature, to inveſtigate the Divine Eſſence, or mode of exiſtence, yet, if in our own nature we can find any analogy to illuſtrate the ſubject, we may ſurely lay hold of it, to reconcile the doctrine to human reaſon, conſiſtently with that deference which we owe to the divine declaration, and the profound humility which ought to accompany all our inquiries reſpecting our Creator.

Now in human nature we ſee, firſt, a material body, which of itſelf is totally inert and incapable of action; but the principle of animal life, with which it is endued, gives it ſenſe, activity, and motion; theſe two we enjoy in common with the creatures of inferior order: but there is ſuperadded in man a rational ſoul, capable of thinking, comparing, and judging, of ſuch ſubjects as are offered to its conſideration; and theſe three principles, though perfectly diſtinct from each other, yet, when united, conſtitute but one man: and ſince we are aſſured that God made man after his own

image, would it be unreaſonable to ſuppoſe, that part of the reſemblance conſiſts in the union of theſe three, to complete our nature, in ſome faint reſemblance to the glorious original from whence we ſprung? This conjecture may at leaſt ſerve to reconcile our reaſon to the doctrine, though we are not able to explain or fully comprehend it.

I would not by this be thought, to ſet up human reaſon as the ſtandard of truth in thoſe things which are revealed to us in ſcripture: becauſe this would take away faith, which is the foundation of all religion: but as we are directed by the * apoſtle, to be ready to give a reaſon for our belief, there certainly is an exerciſe of reaſon not only allowable, but even laudable, and a neceſſary duty in matters of religion; ſince otherwiſe it would be impoſſible for us to perform to our Maker a reaſonable ſervice: for it muſt ever be remembered, that reaſon is the gift of God as well as revelation; and it were impious to ſuppoſe, that his gifts are incompatible, or meant to deſtroy each other. From him proceedeth every good and perfect gift, and all his gifts are ſuch, if we receive them with thankfulneſs, and uſe them as we ought.

Reaſon, therefore, like the other boons of heaven,

* 1 Pet. iii. 15.

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muſt be uſed to the glory of God; but, kept in its proper ſphere, it will ſubmit to faith, and bring all its powers and faculties into ſubjection to divine revelation.

That the doctrine of the Trinity is a doctrine expreſsly revealed in the word of God cannot be denied; and though the intimations of it in the Old Teſtament are not ſo clear and explicit as in the New, yet when compared and conſidered together, they amount to no inconſiderable illuſtration of the doctrine. But in the New Teſtament it is ſo fully and clearly ſet forth, that it ſerves, perhaps, more than any other point of pure doctrine to diſtinguiſh Chriſtians from the reſt of the world. And upon the authority of Chriſt, and his apoſtles and evangeliſts, are all the creeds, doxologies, and ſervices of the Chriſtian church founded.

It would exceed the limits proper for a diſcourſe of this nature, to quote the many texts in which this doctrine is maintained in the New Teſtament. I ſhall therefore only obſerve here, that in the name of the three Perſons all nations were to be baptized; and this muſt continue for ever to be the ſtanding form of admiſſion into the church of Chriſt.

In the ſame name runs the apoſtolic benediction adopted in the daily ſervice of Chriſtians of all denominations;

nominations; namely, "The grace of our Lord "Jeſus Chriſt, and the love of God, and the fellow-"ſhip of the Holy Ghoſt."

I muſt however obſerve, that though the holy ſcriptures are ſo clear in the trinity of Perſons, they are equally poſitive and expreſs in the unity of God. Hence it is that we read ſo frequently of the one Lord, and no other; the only God, beſides whom there is none elſe.

In oppoſition to the many gods of the heathens, Chriſtians are expreſsly commanded to worſhip only one God; and every kind of adoration paid to any other is, by the judgment of a well-inſtructed apoſtle, deemed idolatry. And in that well-known paſſage of St. John, where he declares that *there are Three who bear record in heaven*, he does not fail to add that *theſe Three are One**.

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* 1 John v. 7. The Arians did, and the Socinians of our day do contend, that this paſſage of John is altogether an interpolation, becauſe it is omitted in ſome ancient Greek manuſcript copies of the New Teſtament. But ſuch an omiſſion by no means proves the aſſertion: for before the invention of printing, when all books were copied with the pen, it was very likely to happen, that a careleſs tranſcriber ſhould overlook a paſſage, ſtanding between the ſame words in two places, ſo near to each other as the 7th and 8th verſes. Thus the words, *There are three that bear record*, ver. 7. are the very ſame which our tranſlators have rendered, *There are three that bear witneſs*,

In ſhort, after all we can ſay upon the ſubject, we muſt conclude, that it is a doctrine plainly revealed in ſcripture, which is the only ſource of information, and in which, on a doctrine ſo abſtruſe,

witneſs, ver. 8. *viz.* Τρεις εισιν οι μαρτυρουντες. Now I ſay, that a tranſcriber, who probably wrote for his living, and would of courſe write as faſt as he could, having copied thoſe words in the 7th verſe at one look, and looking again at his original, his eye might poſſibly fall upon the ſame words in the 8th verſe, with which he would naturally proceed, and ſo leave out the remainder of the 7th verſe, *viz. in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghoſt; and theſe three are one.* But it would be abſurd from the overſight of a copier, to overturn the doctrine of the whole Catholic Church, and the authority of all Chriſtian antiquity, in a point of ſuch great importance.

That this paſſage is genuine and not interpolated, we have many proofs from the fathers, whoſe works have come down to us; among which take the following.

The words of the 7th verſe are quoted in ſubſtance by Tertullian, who lived while the genuine and authentic writings of the apoſtles were extant. Adv. Praxæam. chap. xxv. Cyprian quotes them twice; who being biſhop of Carthage, ſuffered martyrdom in the year of our Lord 258. Theſe are of greater antiquity than Arius, who made no figure till the fourth century. Vide Cypr. de Unitat. Eccleſ. & epiſt. ad Jubaianum.

Beſides, John's argument, without the 7th verſe, muſt appear defective; for as the witneſs of men, mentioned in the 9th verſe, refers to the witneſs on earth mentioned in the 8th, the witneſs of God, there ſpoken of, muſt refer to the witneſs in heaven, mentioned in the 7th; otherwiſe that expreſſion *the witneſs of God*, could not pertinently be introduced in this place. See Dr. Mills de Epiſt. prim. Joanni. p. 742.

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ſo far above our comprehenſion, we ought to reſt with full ſatisfaction; ſince by ſearching for information from any other, we ſhall only bewilder ourſelves, and loſe ſight of the object of our purſuit.

We are told of one Simonides, an eminent poet and philoſopher, who, being aſked by Dionyſius the tyrant what God was, demanded a day to anſwer the inquiry. When the day was expired, he aſked for two; and every time when he was expected to anſwer the queſtion, he always demanded double the time for conſideration which had before been allowed him. This great man found that the more he contemplated the Divine nature, the more he went out of his depth; and inſtead of finding an end to his inquiries, was more deeply involved in the contemplation; and that for the very reaſon alleged by Zophar in the words following our text: "It is as high as heaven, what "canſt thou do? Deeper than hell, what canſt "thou know?"

I muſt confeſs I cannot approve the little artificial ſubterfuges, which ſome have made uſe of in order to avoid the force and plain ſenſe of the texts urged in ſupport of this doctrine; and think it much ſafer, as well as wiſer, to abide by the natural

tural conſtruction of ſuch paſſages, than to endeavour by artifices and ſubtilties to fix a ſenſe upon them contrary to the genuine meaning of the expreſſions. Nor muſt the difficulty of bringing down this ſublime myſtery to the level of our capacity, tempt us to deny or diſbelieve it. Our mind has its limits, beyond which it cannot go; but the infinity of God ſets him above all limitation or bounds whatever; therefore, by ſearching we cannot find him out, and all to which we can attain is far ſhort of perfect knowledge. For, as the wiſe ſon of Sirach obſerves, when we have gone to our utmoſt in the inveſtigation, * *there are yet hid greater things than theſe be, for we have ſeen but a few of his works.*

Finally, my brethren, ſeeing the ſcriptures are ſo clear in aſſerting this doctrine, and that it is the diſtinguiſhing characteriſtic of our religion; let us hold faſt the profeſſion of our faith without wavering. Let us unite with angels and archangels, and all the company of heaven; with cherubim and ſeraphim; with prophets, apoſtles, and martyrs, and with the holy church throughout all the world, in the worſhip and adoration of the holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabaoth; the Father of

* Eccleſ. xliii. 32.

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an infinite majeſty, his honourable, true, and only Son, and alſo the Holy Ghoſt, the Comforter; the king eternal, immortal, and inviſible, the only wiſe God. To whom be honour, and glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

SER-

SERMON XXVIII.

[Preached for a charity ſchool ſupported by voluntary contribution.]

1 KINGS xvii. 16.

And the barrel of meal waſted not, neither did the cruſe of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord, which he ſpake by Elijah.

AT the beginning of this chapter, we find the prophet Elijah threatening the land of Iſrael with drought for a ſeries of years; which, as our Lord explains it in the 4th chap. of St. Luke's goſpel, 25th verſe, continued for three years and ſix months.

To avoid the cruel perſecution of Ahab upon this threat, the prophet fled by divine command, and hid himſelf by the brook Cherith, where he was miraculouſly fed by the ravens, whom the Lord had commanded to ſuſtain him. But when, in proceſs of time, the heat and drought had cauſed the ſprings to fail, and conſequently dried up the brook, God, willing to preſerve the life of his

ſervant, orders him to Zarephath; where another miracle was to be wrought for his ſupport: and not for his only, but for that of others alſo, as appears by the ſequel of the ſtory, which we ſhall take in the words of the ſacred hiſtorian himſelf, from the 8th verſe.

And the word of the Lord came unto him, ſaying, Ariſe, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth unto Zidon, and dwell there. Behold I have commanded a widow woman there to ſuſtain thee. So he aroſe and went to Zarephath: and when he came to the gate of the city, behold the widow woman was there gathering ſticks; and he called to her, and ſaid, Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a veſſel, that I may drink. And as ſhe was going to fetch it, he called to her, and ſaid, Bring me, I pray thee, a morſel of bread in thine hand. And ſhe ſaid, As the Lord thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but an handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruſe; and behold I am gathering two ſticks, that I may go and dreſs it for me and my ſon, that we may eat it and die. And Elijah ſaid unto her, Fear not; go and do as thou haſt ſaid; but make me thereof a little cake firſt, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy ſon. For thus ſaith the Lord God of Iſrael, the barrel of meal ſhall not waſte, neither ſhall the cruſe of oil fail, until the day that the Lord ſendeth rain upon

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the earth. And ſhe went and did according to the ſaying of Elijah: and ſhe and he and her houſe did eat many days. And the barrel of meal waſted not, neither did the cruſe of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord which he ſpake by Elijah.

From this ſtory, thus conſidered at large, ſeveral uſeful and profitable obſervations ariſe.

The firſt I ſhall mention is, that the greateſt power and the moſt inveterate malice upon earth, cannot diſtreſs a good man, beyond the power of divine mercy to protect and deliver him. When the integrity of Elijah, in crying againſt the ſins of the land of Iſrael, and propheſying evil to the wicked houſe of Ahab, had driven him from the royal preſence and protection, the Lord cared for him in his diſtreſs, and the very ravens were commanded to divide their prey with the prophet; * *and they brought him bread and fleſh in the morning, and bread and fleſh in the evening*, ver. 6.

Hence

* This circumſtance has to ſome appeared ſo aſtoniſhing as to be wholly incredible; and they have rendered the Hebrew word OREBIM, *merchants*, not *ravens*, becauſe there is a word not unlike it in ſound uſed in Ezek. xxvii. 17. ſignifying the merchants that frequented the markets of Tyre. But, as Bochart obſerves, they are never called *Orebim*, but *Orebe*. Others are of opinion that the text muſt be here corrupted, and ought to be read *Arabians*. But beſides that no Arabians were in that part of the country, the prophet's

Hence, ſecondly, we learn, that contentment with whatever God is pleaſed to beſtow upon us, is a virtue the moſt likely to promote our future advancement in his favour. When the prophet was ſent to Cherith, the cold earth his only bed, without any covering but the ſky, baniſhed from the ſociety of men, expoſed in the open air to heat by day and cold by night, without eye to ſee or friend to pity him, his patient and contented ſpirit murmured not at the ordinance of heaven; but he ſteadily maintained his duty, and kept his ſtation, till the Almighty thought proper to remove him. The conſequence of which was, that from this deſolate place he was ſent to the city of Zarephath; where the hoſpitality of the widow received him into a more comfortable habitation, and lodged him in an upper loft or chamber, as appears by the 19th verſe of this chapter. And happy were it for

phet's place of concealment would ſoon have been diſcovered to Ahab, if merchants, or Arabians, or any others had been acquainted with it. Cherith ſeems to be one of thoſe brooks which deſcending from mountains run with great rapidity. It is well known that ſuch torrents after great rains ſwell to a great ſize, and form deep valleys, and even caves in the earth on the ſides of their courſe. In one of theſe, the prophet found a hiding place, and was there preſerved by the care and ſpecial direction of divine providence, who commanded the ravens to feed him, and miraculouſly ſupplied them with proviſions fit for his ſupport.

us, if like him we would with gratitude and contentment receive the good gifts of providence, as he is pleaſed to beſtow them, and enjoy them with contentment, without murmuring at our fate, if we are denied ſome things we might perhaps wiſh for, or being lifted up with pride for the poſſeſſion of thoſe things we have. Such a bleſſed tranquillity of mind would certainly make us happy in ourſelves for the preſent; and our pious reſignation to the diſpenſations of God would ſecure to us his favour in time to come. But to proceed.

We here ſee who they are that may depend on divine aid in the time of trouble; and theſe are the faithful and obedient ſervants of God. We need not doubt but the widow of Zarephath was of this caſt, * ſince it appears that the prophet was ſent expreſsly for her relief, at a time when nothing leſs than the immediate interpoſition of providence could have ſaved her and her houſe from periſhing with want. For, at the time of his arrival, ſhe had no more proviſion left, than an handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruſe. But as a farther proof of the piety of this good woman, we are told, that, notwithſtanding her extreme diſtreſs, ſhe believed the promiſes of God for her relief; and though ſhe was reduced to her laſt

* See Luke iv. 25, 26.

handful

handful of meal, yet ſhe withheld not the cake from the prophet, but afforded him a refreſhment of what ſhe had, though the whole was but a little morſel. Now God, who is the ſearcher of hearts, knew certainly this woman's that it was good; and therefore ſent his prophet into her houſe, and a bleſſing into her little ſtore, that the one ſhould be to comfort and the other to ſupport her, as long as ſhe ſhould have need of either.

From this ſtory, thus illuſtrated, may be deduced the following doctrines.

Firſt, That it is the duty of every one to diſtribute to the poor and neceſſitous ſome part of what God has beſtowed upon him, whether it be little or much.

And, ſecondly, that is his intereſt.

For the firſt, I muſt obſerve, that with reſpect to God, all mankind are upon a footing: the greateſt monarch and the pooreſt beggar are equally related to him, the creatures of his power, and the dependants of his providence; and conſequently that the care of his bounty and goodneſs is equally the birth-right of all: and though, for the good order of ſociety, and government of the world, there are and muſt be diſtinctions among men, and ſome are appointed to govern, while others are bound to obey; yet theſe are wiſely and graciouſ-

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ly intended for the mutual welfare, comfort, and ſupport of each other: and as it is ordained that the labour of the poor ſhall be given for the rich, ſo are the rich commanded to feed the poor. And indeed moſt reaſonably, for he ſtands in need of him. The rich could no longer enjoy his riches, did they not produce to him the fruits of the poor man's labour; and as the poor labour to clothe and feed the rich, it is but juſt that it ſhould be repaid them in kind. And as this is agreeable to our natural notions of right reaſon and juſtice, ſo if we conſult the word of God, we there find it mentioned as our great, and, as it were, our principal duty, to be generous and charitable to our fellow creatures, as occaſions offer, and their neceſſities require, eſpecially the poor. Thus, in the 23d chapter of Exodus, ver. 11. the Jews are commanded to dedicate the ſeventh part of their increaſe to this purpoſe; and it is expreſsly ſaid, *that the poor of thy people may eat.* Again, Levit. xix. 9, 10. *When ye reap the harveſt of your land, thou ſhalt not wholly reap the corners of thy field, neither ſhalt thou gather the gleanings of thy harveſt. And thou ſhalt not glean thy vineyard. Thou ſhalt leave them for the poor and ſtranger.* And this command is ſealed with this weighty admonition,

I am

I am the Lord: the Lord of thee, and all that thou haſt; therefore preſume not to diſobey me.

And if we carefully peruſe the ſacred oracles, we ſhall find ſcarce any duty ſo frequently inculcated, or the neglect of any ſo ſeverely reprehended. *He that oppreſſeth the poor* (ſays Solomon, Prov. xiv. 31.) *reproacheth his Maker: but he that honoureth him hath mercy on the poor.* And again, chap. xxi. 13. *He that ſtoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he alſo ſhall cry himſelf, and ſhall not be heard.* And again, chap. xxii. 16. *He that oppreſſeth the poor to increaſe his riches, ſhall ſurely come to want.* Here you ſee the curſe of God evidently denounced againſt cruelty and oppreſſion to the poor; and therefore from hence alſo we may conclude, that to have mercy on the poor is to obey the will of his Maker.

Another motive to the obſervance of this duty is, that it is the beſt method we can deviſe to expreſs our gratitude to God for his mercies vouchſafed to ourſelves. Our goods extend not to him, neither doth he ſtand in need of our ſervices; for * *all the wild beaſts of the foreſt are his, and ſo are the cattle upon a thouſand hills:* and were it poſſible for him to want any thing, ſurely he need not ap-

* Pſalm l. 10.

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ply to us to be ſupplied; for * *the whole earth is the Lord's, and the fulneſs thereof, and he can command every creature he has made to do him ſervice.* The only method, therefore, left us of ſhowing our gratitude to the hand that feeds us, is beſtowing ſome part of what we receive on thoſe who ſtand in need of it, and to whom it may prove a ſeaſonable relief and an acceptable ſervice. And thus it has always been underſtood, that liberality to the poor is one of the beſt methods of acknowledging the ſenſe we have of our obligations to God for his goodneſs to us.

When the wicked Haman, who was prime miniſter of Ahaſuerus, had conſpired againſt the whole nation of the Jews; and it pleaſed the Lord, by the interpoſition of Eſther the queen, to deliver them from the conſequences of his cruel and unjuſt deſigns, they appointed the days of their eſcape to be for ever kept holy; and to expreſs their gratitude to God in a more particular and ſubſtantial manner, for ſaving them from their enemies, it was ordained that thoſe days ſhould be eſpecially employed in *ſending gifts to the poor* (Eſt. ix. 22.). Thus you have ſeen from ſcripture, from reaſon, and from experience, how much it is our duty to be liberal to the poor. I ſhall now proceed to

* Pſalm l. 12.

ſhow you that it is alſo our intereſt; which is what I propoſed in the ſecond place.

For the proof of this we need only obſerve, that there is ſcarce any thing valuable, any thing worthy the purſuit of a rational creature, that is not in ſcripture annexed to the performance of this duty, nor any evil to be feared or ſuffered, with which the neglect of it is not threatened. With regard to the things of this life, the Pſalmiſt is very explicit upon the ſubject in the 41ſt pſalm, ver. 1, 2, 3. *Bleſſed is he that conſidereth the poor; the Lord will deliver him in the time of trouble. The Lord will preſerve him, and keep him alive; and he ſhall be bleſſed upon the earth; and thou wilt not deliver him into the will of his enemies. The Lord will ſtrengthen him upon the bed of languiſhing, and will make all his bed in his ſickneſs.* What a bleſſed hope, what a joyful conſolation is this, to the liberal and benevolent ſoul! that when trouble or ſorrow overtakes him, the Lord will deliver him, becauſe *he* has before delivered the poor, according to his ability. Happy were it for us, my brethren, in ſuch a caſe, when pain and diſeaſe attack us, when ſickneſs ſeizes, and death ſtands threatening over us (which, by the bye, will ſooner or later moſt certainly be the caſe of us all): Happy were it then, I ſay, if, with holy Job, we could reflect upon

upon our paſt life, and ſay,*_When the ear heard me, then it bleſſed me, and when the eye ſaw me, it gave witneſs to me; becauſe I delivered the poor that cried, the fatherleſs, and him that had none to help him. The bleſſing of him that was ready to periſh came upon me, and I cauſed the widow's heart to ſing for joy. I was eyes to the blind, and feet was I to the lame. I was a father to the poor, and the cauſe which I knew not I ſearched out._

The conſideration of a life ſpent in this noble, this truly godlike exerciſe, will give more pleaſure, more real and ſubſtantial ſatisfaction at our departing hour, than all the wealth that our utmoſt parſimony can ſcrape together, or all the power, titles, and honours, that the greateſt worldly ambition can deſire, or the utmoſt profuſion purchaſe. This is that which alone (when the world and the luſts thereof ſhall paſs away) can give the ſoul a rational and ſublime ſatisfaction, a joy unſpeakable and full of glory.

Not that I would have it thought, that the reward of liberality to the poor, even in this life, is always deferred till we come to leave it; on the contrary, we are told that † _the liberal ſoul ſhall be made fat, and he that watereth ſhall be watered alſo_

* Chap. xxix. 11, &c. † Prov. xi. 15.

himſelf. And again, * *he that giveth to the poor ſhall not lack:* and in chap. xi. 24. *There is that ſcattereth and yet increaſeth, and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, yet it tendeth to poverty.* The evident meaning of all which texts is this, that whoever ſhall ſhow mercy to the poor, by diſtributing among them a ſhare of the gifts of providence to him; the bleſſing of God ſhall ſo follow his lawful endeavours, that his wealth ſhall increaſe, notwithſtanding the caſual diminutions ariſing from his bounty. Thus, with reſpect to the things of this life, do we ſee that it is our intereſt, our beſt and wiſeſt policy, to be careful of performing this duty aright. But if we carry our thoughts beyond the grave, and ſee what ineſtimable rewards attend the practice of this virtue in the life to come, we cannot need much reaſoning to convince us on which ſide our true intereſt lies.

Here a glorious proſpect opens to the good man: that the Lord, the righteous Judge, will not forget his labour of love, but plentifully repay that liberality, with which he honoured him in this life. On that great and final day, when Chriſt the king of glory ſhall appear, and the holy angels ſhall ſurround his throne, to be the miniſters and ſpecta-

* Prov. xxviii. 27.

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tors of his righteous judgment; then ſhall he ſay to the righteous, *Come, ye bleſſed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world. For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat; I was thirſty, and ye gave me drink; I was a ſtranger, and ye took me in; naked, and ye clothed me; ſick, and ye viſited me: I was in priſon, and ye came unto me. For in as much as ye have done it unto one of the leaſt of theſe my brethren, ye have done it unto me.*

But if the hopes of eternal reward have no influence on us, ſurely to the terrors of eternal puniſhment, none can be indifferent. Hear then what Chriſt will ſay to thoſe on his left hand on that day—to thoſe who have oppreſſed, or at beſt have never relieved, the poor. The ſentence is ſhort, but, O! how terrible! *Depart from me, ye curſed, into everlaſting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.* For I was an hungred, &c. *And theſe ſhall go away into everlaſting puniſhment.*

As much therefore as we regard the favour of God and the bleſſings of the poor; as much as we wiſh the peace of our own minds, and the advancement of our fortunes; if our ſouls, our bodies, and all that we have, our preſent happineſs, and our eternal ſalvation deſerve our attention,

juſt

juſt ſo much ought we to be careful to practiſe this duty of mercy and liberality to the poor.

Seeing then, brethren, the duty is ſo great, and the obligations to the practice of it are of ſuch weight and conſequence, the only enquiry that remains to be made is, who are the proper objects of our benevolence and charity? To them the apoſtle gives us ample direction in Galat. vi. 10. *Let us do good unto all, eſpecially unto them that are of the houſhold of faith.*

The widow of Zarephath undoubtedly conſidered that the perſon to whom ſhe was liberal was the ſervant of God; and therefore truſted that a bleſſing would follow her bounty: and from this conſideration, I am well perſuaded, ariſes the nobleſt as well as the moſt prevailing motive to charity in virtuous minds; that it is beſtowed on thoſe who are dear to God, and that he will graciouſly condeſcend to conſider our generoſity, as a voluntary and reaſonable duty addreſſed to him.

Suffer me then, in concluſion of this diſcourſe, to obſerve to you with what peculiar force and energy all theſe arguments ſhould prevail with you, to exert yourſelves in fulfilling the pious intention of our preſent meeting. You have ſeen how much it is your duty and your intereſt to be liberal to the

the poor, and thoſe poor who deſerve your moſt particular conſideration have been deſcribed in your hearing.

To this deſcription in every point do thoſe poor children anſwer who now preſent themſelves to ſolicit your favour. The circumſtances of childhood and indigence joined together are ſufficient (one would think) to awaken pity in the hardeſt heart. But if any can be ſo obdurate as to turn a deaf ear to the perſuaſions of humanity, at leaſt let their own intereſt prevail with them. Theſe are the children of the houſehold of faith; and the leaſt of them has the honour to be called a brother to the Lord of glory; that Lord who, though he was infinitely and tranſcendently rich, yet for your ſakes became poor; that Lord, who will accept and reward your liberality to them as if the favour were done to himſelf. What a glorious opportunity this of ſecuring an intereſt in the merits of the bleſſed Redeemer of ſouls at the ſmall and eaſy expence of ſome trifle to feed the poor lambs of his flock; and what a folly, what a crying ſin muſt it be to neglect this reaſonable ſervice when the reward attending it is ſo great.

Finally, brethren, when thoſe poor infants come before you, and, holding up their little hands, pray you to remember them; be not hard-hearted, but look

look with pity on their tender years; do your beſt according to your abilities, to ſupply their wants, and let them not depart without a bleſſing: and may the bleſſing of God never depart from you.

SER-

SERMON XXIX.

2 KINGS v. 18, 19.

In this thing the Lord pardon thy ſervant, that when my maſter goeth into the houſe of Rimmon to worſhip there, and he leaneth on my hand, and I bow myſelf in the houſe of Rimmon: when I bow down myſelf in the houſe of Rimmon, the Lord pardon thy ſervant in this thing. And he ſaid unto him, Go in peace.

THESE words are the concluſion of a ſpeech made to the prophet Eliſha, by Naaman, captain of the hoſt of the king of Syria; or, as we ſhould ſay in our modern ſtyle, commander in chief of all that monarch's forces; together with the prophet's anſwer.

The ſtory of which they make a part conveys ſome uſeful leſſons of inſtruction, which I mean to bring to your recollection at preſent.

I. If riches, and honours, and the other advantages of the world, could exempt their poſſeſſors

from calamity and misfortune, they would be more worthy of that eager purſuit, and indefatigable labour and induſtry, with which we ſo frequently ſee them followed after. But in numberleſs inſtances which daily experience brings to view, we find that thoſe imaginary bleſſings, far from defending thoſe who enjoy them, from the evils and accidents to which others are liable, leave them as much expoſed to misfortunes, diſeaſes, and caſualties, as the meaneſt of their vaſſals or dependents. Had not this been the caſe, Naaman had not come to Samaria; nor had the ſtory of his cure been recorded for our inſtruction.

Naaman, we are told, was a great man with his maſter, and honourable. He was that valiant and ſkilful general by whom the Lord had given deliverance unto Syria, and no doubt conſidered as the deliverer of his country; and conſequently treated by all ranks with that honourable reſpect which ſervices ſo beneficial deſerved. But amid all theſe advantages, one misfortune attended him more than ſufficient to render all the honours his ſovereign could confer upon him taſteleſs and inſipid, and himſelf incapable of reliſhing any enjoyment of life—he was a leper.

Could his diſorder have been cured by natural means, or medical ſkill, theſe could not have been

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wanting to a man ſo high in the favour of his prince, and ſo able to purchaſe the ſervices of thoſe who were the moſt likely to relieve his malady. We may therefore conclude that his leproſy was of that malignant * kind which phyſicans agree cannot be cured by art, and which therefore muſt require a miraculous power to remove it.

While Naaman had no thoughts of applying to the true God, or to any other for aid, and had probably deſpaired of a cure, that God, who is frequently found of him who ſought him not, furniſhed him with the means of recovery in ſuch a way as human wiſdom or ſagacity could not have diſcovered.

Some Syrian ſoldiers had made an incurſion into the land of Iſrael, from whence they carried off, among other booty, a young Iſraelitiſh maid, who was afterwards preſented to Naaman's wife, and waited on her as a ſervant. This damſel, ſeeing the loathſome condition of her maſter, and hear-

* Λεύκη. Celſus mentions ſeveral kinds of leproſy: and ſays, that thoſe which he calls *alphos* and *melas* may be eaſily cured; but that to which he gives the name of *leuke* (white), will not ſubmit to medicine, or any art of man. Celſ. de Med. l. v. That this was the kind with which Naaman was afflicted, appears from the prophet's transferring it to Gehazi, his own ſervant; who, we are told, ver. 27. went out from his preſence a leper as white as ſnow.

ing

ing the melancholy complaints which it could not fail to excite in the family, expreſſed an earneſt wiſh, that her Lord were with the prophet who was in Samaria, for that he would recover him of his leproſy. This being reported to Naaman, he applied to the king, and obtained leave to go to Samaria, and a letter to the king of Iſrael, recommending this favourite to his notice. Naaman himſelf, judging of the prophet, as he would of the prieſts who gave out the oracles of the heathen idols, took care to provide himſelf with a large ſum of money: ten talents of ſilver, and ſix thouſand pieces of gold, amounting, by the computation of ſome learned antiquarians, to near L.19,000 of our money, beſides ten changes of raiment; thinking by ſo ample a reward to excite the greater diligence of the prophet, to exert his utmoſt ſkill and power in removing his loathſome and cruel diſorder.

The king of Syria, by his letter, no doubt meant, that Jehoram, who then reigned in Iſrael, ſhould take care to recommend Naaman to the prophet for cure: but this not being ſo plainly expreſſed as it ought to have been, Jehoram took it as if the king of Syria meant to inſult him, and had made this a handle to begin a quarrel with him. He therefore appeals to his people, or at leaſt

leaſt to his council, ſaying, * *Am I God to kill and to make alive, that this man doth ſend unto me, to recover a man of his leproſy? Wherefore, conſider, I pray you, and ſee how he ſeeketh a quarrel with me.* He therefore rent his clothes, which in thoſe days was the uſual ſign of grief or vexation. This threw the whole court, and conſequently the city, into a general conſternation.

The circumſtance being related to Eliſha the prophet, he ſent to the king, firſt reflecting on him and in a manner reproving him, for his needleſs fear of the Syrian; for that if the leper were ſent to him, he would quickly ſhow him that the God of Iſrael could enable his ſervant to cleanſe him, in a way that he ſhould not ſo much as gueſs at, till he came to prove its happy affects.

This exactly accorded with Naaman's wiſh; for it was not to a king, but to a prophet that he had been directed, as a perſon able to effect his cure. But when he, with his retinue, had arrived at the prophet's houſe, and Eliſha, inſtead of waiting on him in perſon, only ſent him a meſſage by his ſervant, to go and waſh in Jordan ſeven times, the great man's pride was hurt, and he turned off in a rage.

His attendants, however, more cool and com-

* Ver. 7.

poſed,

poſed, and probably not ſo proud as their maſter, ventured to remonſtrate with him upon the ſubject: and approaching him with due reſpect and deference, addreſſed him by the revered title of father, which, in their language, was the uſual appellation to perſons of high condition, and ſaid, * *If the prophet had bid thee do ſome great thing, wouldſt thou not have done it? How much rather then when he ſaith to thee, Waſh and be clean?* Had Eliſha demanded the rich preſent thou haſt brought for him, or bidden thee offer a coſtly ſacrifice to his God, or inſiſted on any eminent ſervice to be done by thee for his country, ſurely the cure of thy diſorder would have juſtified thee in complying with the demand: how much more then ſhouldſt thou comply with a direction ſo much more eaſy, as only to waſh in a ſtream of pure water, with the promiſe, that by ſo doing thy health ſhall be reſtored?

Happy is the man who meets with a faithful friend and an honeſt adviſer, even in the humble ſtation of a ſervant. Had Naaman been deſtitute of ſuch in his retinue, he had remained a leper all the days of his life.

Here, however, Naaman ſhowed himſelf to be

* Ver. 13.

a reaſon-

a reaſonable and prudent man, not ſo much provoked but he could liſten to reaſon, even in the mouth of a ſervant: he accordingly went, and dipped himſelf ſeven times in the river Jordan: but what muſt have been his joy, his wonder, and his thankfulneſs to God, when he came up the ſeventh time, to find his diſorder removed, and his fleſh become clean, as that of a little child. He returns to the prophet, who now admitted him to his preſence, and there, in a pious tranſport, declares his full conviction that there is no God in all the earth but in Iſrael, and his reſolution for the future to worſhip no other Deity.

When he had thus expreſſed his faith in the true God, he would have teſtified his gratitude to the prophet, by preſenting him with the rich offering he had brought for the purpoſe. But Eliſha poſitively refuſed any reward, and though preſſed by Namaan to receive ſomething, he ſtill perſiſted in the refuſal.

By this refuſal, he gave Namaan to underſtand that miraculous cures, ſuch as he had experienced, were not objects of ſale, or ſuch as could be purchaſed by money; and that the prophets of the true God differed in all reſpects from the prieſts of heathen idols. Theſe latter received gifts and oblations, for miracles and cures which they could not

not perform; whereas the others wrought the cures without any view to remuneration, in obedience to the free and unbounded mercy of the God whom they ſerved.

There are undoubtedly many caſes, wherein the ſervants and miniſters of God may lawfully receive the liberalities provided for their ſupport: for * *ſo hath the Lord ordained, that they who preach the goſpel ſhould live of the goſpel.* But there are alſo caſes, wherein ſuch acceptance would be criminal. Of theſe we have an inſtance, recorded in the Acts of the Apoſtles †, where we are told of one Simon a ſorcerer, who would have purchaſed the power of conferring the gifts of the Holy Ghoſt. The ſevere rebuke which this man received, is an awful leſſon to us, that things ſacred are not to be made objects of ſale or traffic. Holy orders for example, and the Chriſtian ſacraments, are not to be ſold for money; but devoutly and freely adminiſtered to thoſe who are duly qualified for them.

Of all this Eliſha was aware; and Naaman, convinced of it alſo by the noble and diſintereſted conduct of the prophet, from offering a reward, proceeds to aſking a boon. † *Shall there not then,*

* 1 Cor. ix. 14. † Chap. viii. 18, 19, 20, 21.

‡ Ver. 17.

I pray

I pray thee (ſays he), *be given to thy ſervant two mules burden of earth? For thy ſervant will henceforth offer neither burnt offering nor ſacrifice unto other gods, but unto the Lord.*

Two mules burden of earth could be no great preſent for the prophet to give, or Naaman to receive: but with this portion of earth, he hoped alſo to receive a bleſſing from the prophet, that would hallow the altar which he meant to build or at leaſt to cover with it, and render the Deity whom he meant to worſhip for the future propitious to his devotions.

Having, as we may eaſily ſuppoſe, obtained this requeſt, and encouraged no doubt by the prophet's manner and behaviour, he goes on to enquire concerning a point of conſcience, which he earneſtly wiſhed to get ſolved, in the moſt ſatisfactory manner: namely, whether he might be pardoned, for accompanying his maſter, when he went to worſhip in the temple of his idol Rimmon. A modern tranſlator * has, I think with good reaſon, put the words of our text in the interrogative form. *In this thing will the Lord pardon thy ſervant? When my maſter goeth to worſhip in the temple of* † *Rimmon, he leaneth on my arm; and I muſt bow myſelf*

* Dr. Geddes.

† Rimmon ſeems to have been the principal of the many

ſelf down in the temple of Rimmon: if on that occaſion, I bow myſelf in the temple of Rimmon, will the Lord pardon thy ſervant?

It appears to me, that Naaman in this caſe acted a very ingenuous and honeſt part: he held in his own country an office of great dignity and importance; the duty of which obliged him to attend the king his maſter to the temple of his idol: but having now determined to forſake that idolatry entirely, he wiſhed to be ſatisfied, whether a compliance in this part of his duty could be diſpenſed with, or if in conſequence of his converſion he muſt reſign his office? This was an enquiry very natural for Naaman to make, and the prophet anſwered it certainly as it deſerved: *Go in peace.* As much as to ſay, trouble not yourſelf with imaginary difficulties: The God whom you have choſen, and now vowed to ſerve, will point out a way to juſtify your choice of him, and ſo facilitate your ſervice, as to enable you to perform your vow, without violating your integrity to him, or your loyalty to your lawful ſovereign: ſet therefore your heart at reſt. Go in peace.

It was not the intention of Eliſha to initiate

idols worſhipped at Damaſcus. Selden derives the name from *rum* or *ram*, which ſignifies high or exalted; and Heſychius ſays that ὁ Ραμὰς is the ſame with ὕψιστος θεὸς, the moſt high God. Lex. in verb. Ραμὰς.

Naaman

Naaman into the Jewiſh* religion; nor do we find that he had any authority to that purpoſe: wherefore, having by his miraculous cure ſuffici-

*While the legal worſhip ſubſiſted, if any foreigner choſe to be circumciſed and keep the whole law of Moſes, he was received into full communion, and admitted to all the privileges of a native Jew: theſe were called proſelytes of juſtice: but there was another ſort called proſelytes of the gate: theſe were ſuch as were not bound to circumciſion, or any other ceremony of the Jewiſh law, but only worſhipped the true God, and obſerved the ſeven precepts which were impoſed upon Noah and his family. Theſe precepts were, 1. To worſhip the one true God, and renounce idolatry. 2. To abſtain from murder. 3. Not to eat fleſh with the blood in it. 4. To abſtain from adultery, inceſt, and other carnal impurities. 5. To practiſe juſtice, and ſubmit to lawful authority. 6. Not to rob, ſteal, or commit perjury. 7. Not to eat any part of an animal ſtill living. Theſe were ſtill conſidered as Gentiles, and therefore unclean; for which reaſon they were not admitted to worſhip with the native Jews, the deſcendants of Abraham, but a particular place was aſſigned them in the temple, called the Court of the Gentiles. Of this claſs were Cornelius the centurion, Queen Candace's eunuch, and Nicholas of Antioch, with others of whom we read in the Acts of the Apoſtles. It has been ſaid that Naaman of whom we are now treating was of this claſs; but I do not ſee how the text warrants this opinion. We hear nothing of his adopting any of the above precepts except the firſt, nor of any ſuch promiſe being required of him. That after his cure he ſhould expreſs his gratitude to God, by whoſe mercy it had been effected, was natural; neither can it be denied, but he might afterwards endeavour to acquire an acquaintance with the divine law, and from admiring, might be induced to obey its moral precepts; but as the ſacred hiſtorian is ſilent on that head, we have nothing but conjecture to authoriſe any opinion about it.

ently

ently proved the power, and aſſerted the honour of the true God, he leaves him to the exerciſe of that natural religion, which reaſon ought to have taught to all mankind, the worſhip of one only living and true God, the Creator, governor, and preſerver of the univerſe.

The time for converting the nations was not yet come. That was a matter reſerved for the days of the Meſſiah, when, and not before, **Repentance and remiſſion of ſins were to be preached to all nations in his name;* when a religion was to be publiſhed to the world, not conſiſting of types and ſhadows, or a ceremonious, ritual, and carnal ſervice, as was that of the Jews; but a rational and holy ſyſtem of faith, a pure and ſublime morality, and a worſhip conſiſtent with the wiſdom of God, and the true dignity of a reaſonable ſoul: *a worſhip in ſpirit and in truth.*

Thoſe who have not ſeen this paſſage in the ſame light as I have now explained it, have drawn concluſions from it repugnant to religion and good conſcience. Some have argued from hence, that Naaman being allowed to attend the king to the temple of Rimmon, and bow before the image of that idol, was a tacit connivance at idolatry in the prophet, when it anſwered a worldly purpoſe; and

* Luke xxiv. 27.

hence,

hence, ſay they, why may not we bend our religion to our ſecular intereſts, and preſerve our eſtates, our honours, offices, or other advantages, by temporizing and yielding to the paſſions, humours, or commands, of our patrons or ſuperiors? The text, however, as I think, truly expounded, is no foundation for any ſuch inference. I think it would be more agreeable to truth, as well as charity, to conclude, that Naaman having reſolved to worſhip no deity for the future but the God of Iſrael, and having afterwards recollected, that part of the duty of his office was to wait on his maſter in the public worſhip, agreeable to the manner of his country, was anxious to know if this action could be performed conſiſtently with the vow he had made, and which he was determined to preſerve inviolate even at the expence of reſigning his poſt, if the prophet told him it was neceſſary.

But if I judge too favourably of Naaman, one thing I am ſure of, that we need not run to the ſtory of this man, or any other obſcure paſſage, as a foundation for either faith or practice, when we have ſo much clearer light, and ſo much better direction, from ſo many other places of holy writ, whoſe meaning cannot be miſtaken. We are plainly and repeatedly commanded to love and fear

fear God, and to worſhip no other; and in our practice to follow the example, not of Naaman, or any other, but of him * *who did no ſin, neither was guile found in his mouth.*

We know, from plain and indiſputable precepts, what duties God requires of us, though we do not know the difficulties we may meet with in the diſcharge of them. When ſuch difficulties occur, we are allowed to uſe the beſt efforts of our ſkill and induſtry, to extricate ourſelves from them; but we muſt be careful never to make ſhipwreck of faith, or violate conſcience; and whenever we find any worldly advantage we are poſſeſſed of, not to be tenable but by a ſinful conduct, we muſt not heſitate, nor, to gain the whole world (if that were poſſible), offend our Creator. Nothing forbids our endeavouring to pleaſe men in things lawful, and, by offices of civility and acts of kindneſs, rendering ourſelves agreeable to them: but when this cannot be done, without baſe flattery or criminal compliances, we muſt obey God rather than men, and forego the friendſhip of all ſuch ſeducers, however agreeable their company may be, and break off the moſt pleaſing ſociety in the world, rather than ſin againſt God.

2. Another ſort of people, in order to avoid this

* 1 Pet. ii. 22.

fault

fault which they here charge upon Naaman, as if he trimmed between two religions, run into the oppoſite extreme, and are as much afraid of entering into one of our Chriſtian churches, as if they were ſo many temples of Rimmon.

How would Naaman be aſtoniſhed, were he to come into a country where we all profeſs to worſhip the ſame God, nay to hold the ſame faith, and univerſally call ourſelves Chriſtians, and hear the miniſters of Chriſt called idolaters and prieſts of Baal, by thoſe who only differ in ſome modes and forms of external worſhip, which neither party hold to be eſſentially neceſſary to faith or morality! "Would he not be apt to conclude that their "minds were infected with a leproſy worſe than "that which once afflicted his body? A leproſy "which all the waters of baptiſm have not been "able to cleanſe, nor the prayers and hands of the "prophets to drive away, though now for ſo many "hundred years applied to it."

It is to be wiſhed, that ſuch people would make a ſpiritual application of the circumſtances of this great man's ſtory. They would not then contemn the adminiſtration of our prayers and ſacraments, for being made eaſy, plain, and common; but rather be thankful that the yoke of Chriſt is made ſo eaſy, and his burden ſo light; that the inſtitutions

tions of his religion are ſo acceſſible and eaſily complied with by all ranks and conditions; and be perſuaded, as he was, to try the remedy, were it only from the motive which induced him to try the waters of Jordan; namely, the eaſineſs of the application.

Why ſhould the water of Jordan be more efficacious in curing a leproſy than all the rivers of Damaſcus, ſays Naaman? The anſwer is, that the prophet had appointed that ablution for the cure. How, ſay the enemies of our religion, can the water in baptiſm, or the bread and wine in the euchariſt, convey thoſe inward and ſpiritual graces, ſaid to be conveyed by them? I anſwer, by virtue of their inſtitution: for one greater than Eliſha has bleſſed them, and appointed them for the purpoſe.

As the eaſineſs of waſhing in Jordan prevailed upon Naaman to try the experiment, this ſhould prevail with us to attend ſedulouſly to the ordinances of our holy religion; which our Saviour has appointed as the means of grace, and by which we are invited and encouraged to ſtrive, and to hope for eternal life through him. Again,

We ſee, that Naaman, for the cure of his leproſy, was ſo grateful to God, by whoſe power he knew it had been effected, that he determined, at

the

hazard of even offending his ſovereign, and loſing that honourable poſt he held under him, never to offer any ſacrifice, or do any act of religion to an idol for the future. But what is the cure of a leproſy or of any bodily diſorder, to that which has been wrought for us in the redemption of our ſouls by Jeſus Chriſt! How much more thankful ought we to be for a mercy ſo much greater! Our Lord has done for us, what the greateſt of the prophets could not do: he has redeemed our ſouls from death, by * *offering himſelf to God for us through the eternal Spirit, that we might ſerve the living God.*

Had ſuch a benefactor required us to do ſome great thing, how readily, how cheerfully ought we to have done it? Inſtead of which, a ſervice is required of us which we are well aſſured is not grievous. No coſtly ſacrifice, no painful operation, no tedious or difficult proceſs is required of us, no duty commanded us, but ſuch as our beſt reaſon muſt approve, as honourable to ourſelves, and beneficial to the ſociety of which we are members: and for the performance of this reaſonable and eaſy ſervice, we have the promiſe of ſuch powerful aſſiſtance, as cannot fail to inſure our ſucceſs in the purſuit of a happineſs, which our great Deli-

* Heb. ix. 14.

verer alone could reveal, and he only is able to beſtow. *Waſh ſeven times in Jordan* (ſays Eliſha), *and thou ſhalt be clean.* Waſh but once in the waters of baptiſm, ſays the Spirit of Chriſt. Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jeſus Chriſt, and ye ſhall be cleanſed from all filthineſs, both of fleſh and ſpirit: and as Noah and his family were ſaved in the ark from periſhing by water, ſo ſhall ye by water, by *the waſhing of regeneration*, be received and ſaved in the ark of Chriſt's church, and with him be made heirs of everlaſting ſalvation. May the Father of mercies grant this to be the happy lot of all who now hear me, through Jeſus Chriſt our Lord. Amen.

SER-

SERMON XXX.

A Thankſgiving Sermon on the Victory of Lord Nelson over the French Fleet, off the mouth of the Nile; preached at Dundee the 29th of November 1798.

Exodus xv. 7. (firſt part.)

In the greatneſs of thine excellency, thou haſt overthrown them that roſe up againſt thee.

THESE words are a part of that ſublime and pious ſong, ſung by Moſes and the children of Iſrael upon their miraculous deliverance from bondage, and the deſtruction of that powerful armament which was in purſuit of them. The wonderful eſcape of the Iſraelites inſpired them (as well it might) with a tranſport of religious gratitude and heartfelt joy. And Moſes, willing to improve the occaſion preſented to him by this happy diſpoſition of his people, compoſed this admirable hymn, to celebrate the praiſe of their Almighty Deliverer.

It appears from the 21ſt and 22d verſes of this chaper,

chapter, that all the people were divided into two bands or choirs; Moſes and Aaron being placed at the head of the men, and their ſiſter Miriam preſiding over the women.

From this divine and elevated ode, I have ſelected the words of the text; becauſe, while they magnify the exalted power of God, by whom the deliverance was wrought, they forcibly impreſs upon our minds the reaſon of the diſpenſation; for if the Egyptians had not riſen againſt God, it is not likely that ſuch a diſaſter would have befallen them.

They had long oppreſſed the Iſraelites with a cruel bondage; and when God had reſolved to redeem them, inſtead of ſuffering them to proceed peaceably, in obedience to his command, obſtinately refuſed them leave to depart; and even increaſed the hardſhips of their ſlavery, to terrify them from the attempt.

Thus they roſe up, they rebelled againſt the Moſt High, and therefore in the greatneſs of his excellency he overthrew them: thereby vindicating the honour of his government, and the irreſiſtible ſtrength of his omnipotent arm; which the prophet celebrates in the beautiful and energetic language of this ſublime compoſition.

Of all the mercies we receive from God relative

to

to the affairs of this life, there can be none more deſerving of our gratitude than national deliverances; becauſe as no man is ſo great as to be wholly independent of all the reſt of the world, ſo is there none ſo mean and inconſiderable, as not to be in ſome meaſure concerned in the proſperity of that country which affords him food and cloathing, and by whoſe government and laws he is protected in the enjoyment of his life and liberty, and ſecured in the poſſeſſion of any little property which providence has beſtowed upon him.

This is ſo far from being a new doctrine, or a ſingular opinion, that it ſeems to have been the univerſal ſentiment of mankind, from the days of Moſes to this hour; and public rejoicings and general thankſgivings have ever been practiſed, in all ages and nations, upon ſuch occaſions. Of this there are numberleſs inſtances to be met with in the hiſtories both of ancient and modern times: but I mean not to detain you with them now; and ſhall only mention one or two with which you are all acquainted.

When Deborah the propheteſs judged Iſrael, and Barak, encouraged by her good counſel and example, had defeated the army of Jabin, and his general Siſera was ſlain, then we are told was that

ſong

ſong of Deborah and Barak compoſed and ſung, by the elders and people of Iſrael. * *Praiſe ye the Lord for the avenging of Iſrael, when the people willingly offered themſelves*, &c.

It is evident to all who read this hymn, that it is written in a ſtyle, very different from the hiſtorical part of that book; and in a language ſo majeſtic, in ſuch variety of elegant figures, and ſuch natural expreſſions of thoſe ſentiments which the occaſion demanded, that the moſt admired poems of Greece and Rome fall far ſhort of the noble, exalted, and flowing ſtrain of this pious compoſition.

The next occaſion of this kind I ſhall mention, is that mighty deliverance which God wrought for the Jews in the reign of Ahaſuerus, by the inſtrumentality of Eſther the Queen and her uncle Mordecai.

On that occaſion ſo auſpicious to the Jews, they could not but ſee the hand of God moving and acting in their defence; and accordingly they appointed a general thankſgiving with great joy, to be kept as a day of feaſting and gladneſs, and a good, *i. e.* a holy day, to be for ever obſerved by their nation; and they have in fact continued the obſervance of it even to this day. The thirteenth

* Judges, v. 2. et ſeq.

day

day of their month Adar, they annually obſerve as a faſt, and the two following days as a feſtival: the firſt becauſe of the deſtruction intended to be brought on them that day, and the others as a feſtival and general thankſgiving for their deliverance from it.

I could bring many more inſtances, to prove the generality as well as the antiquity of this laudable cuſtom, of praiſing God for national deliverances and ſignal victories, as well from profane as from ſacred hiſtory.

The Gentiles always owned ſuch mercies to be derived from their gods, by offering to them the tithe of their ſpoils; and all the triumphs and ovations, the ſacrifices, the dedication of altars, the building of temples, to the gods by whom they thought their arms had been favoured, of which we read in hiſtory, are juſt ſo many proofs of the univerſal ſenſe of mankind in this reſpect.

The Chriſtians too, ever ſince the time of Conſtantine the Great, have always uſed public and ſolemn praiſes for eminent and deciſive victories.

This practice of the ancient church is, I think, ſufficient fully to juſtify the occaſion of our meeting on this day to bleſs our God with thankful hearts for his late mercies of this kind granted to us.

So

So complete a victory as that of the Nile over an enemy ſo determined, ſo obſtinately courageous, and ſo ſtrongly fortified, was perhaps never atchieved; and this too at a time when they thought and vainly boaſted that nothing could oppoſe them, or ſtop the progreſs of their victorious arms. And though there is nothing in this brilliant portion of our hiſtory that can be ſtrictly called miraculous, yet if we trace the circumſtances of the exploit, from the beginning to its memorable concluſion, we cannot but perceive a providential management of events through the whole that juſtly merits our admiration, and loudly calls for our gratitude.

When that formidable and well-appointed armament, which has with ſavage and unprovoked hoſtility invaded Egypt, ſailed from France, our fleet was ordered to meet them at ſea, and ſtop their progreſs. Had this taken place, though there can be no doubt but our officers and men would have exerted the ſame valour and ſkill which they have always diſplayed when called to the trial; yet of a fleet ſo uncommonly numerous, how many might have eſcaped in an open ſea is impoſſible to ſay; but he who is wiſer than man, having, as we may fairly preſume, determined their total overthrow, ſo ordered the matter, ſo directed the

courſe

courſe of both fleets, that they could not meet, till the enemy had landed their troops; and their ſhips were ſo imbayed, as made it impoſſible for them to avoid a combat, with Britiſh valour directed by Britiſh ſkill and prudence, to which the event has clearly proved they were not equal. This finiſhed their defeat, and completed their ruin: for their army, landed on a hoſtile ſhore, in a climate ſo unfavourable to Europeans, and cut off from all the ſources of ſupply, muſt probably periſh with famine and diſeaſe, ſhould even the inhabitants of the country ſpare them*; while their nobleſt ſhips of war are added to our already invincible navy, and ſerve to grace the triumph of that gallant man, whoſe memorable deeds give greater luſtre to his well-earned coronet, than the ſplendid jewels with which the ſovereign of Egypt has with grateful munificence adorned his brow.

It would be ungenerous and unjuſt, to make invidious diſtinctions between the ſeveral degrees of merit, attached to the different commanders, under whom our arms have triumphed over the various powers combined againſt our country in this war; where all have done the utmoſt of their duty, and prodigies of valour have been performed, proportioned to the circumſtances in which

* This conjecture ſeems to be in ſome meaſure juſtified by what has happened ſince this diſcourſe was delivered.

they have been placed, and the opportunities of exertion which the occaſions have afforded; but it ſeems as if providence had particularly reſerved for this time and place, a ſignal inſtance of his power, in overthrowing them that have riſen up againſt him, by the deſtruction of thoſe daring monſters, who, not contented with the ruin of their own country, wanted to ſpread the havock over the whole world, and involve all mankind in miſery and devaſtation.

Long, too long for the tranquillity of Europe, have they been permitted to proceed in their wicked career, in which neither infancy nor old age could ſhelter the victims of their cruelty, nor could the delicacy of the ſofter ſex protect them from the ſtab of the aſſaſſin, or the brutality of the raviſher.

Hitherto the patience of heaven has borne with their provocations; but their infuriate ambition, their rage for conqueſt, and their thirſt for plunder, have gradually led them into ſuch a ſnare, as they cannot poſſibly eſcape from: and among all the nations of Europe, has divine providence ſelected Britain, to curb the inſolence, and humble the pride of thoſe mercileſs invaders. This is the Lord's doing, and it is juſtly marvellous in the eyes of the whole world.

When the treachery of Holland had obliged

our

our gallant army to retire from ſo great a diſproportion of numbers, thoſe tyrants boaſted of the miſchief they could do, now they had confined the Engliſh to their ſhips; and much, no doubt, they have done: but he who ruleth the raging of the ſea, can alſo ſtill the madneſs of the people. When he lifts up his arm to take vengeance, who ſhall reſiſt his power? When the Lord taketh up the cauſe, his enemies ſhall bite the duſt in anguiſh: for in the greatneſs of his excellency he ſhall overthrow all them that riſe up againſt him.

It is true that the ſtrength of an iſland muſt chiefly conſiſt in a ſuperiority of naval force; and our navy has proved in a thouſand inſtances our defence, when hoſtile invaders have attempted or threatened the conqueſt of our country. Our navy has done more for us than even this: *"The "great and reſpectable figure we make among the "nations of Europe, and I may ſay of the world "at large, the wide extent of our power and influ-"ence, is due, under God, to our naval ſtrength. "To this we ſtand indebted for our flouriſhing "trade and colonies, the ſpread of Britiſh fame, "and which is of more importance, Britiſh free-"dom, through every quarter of the habitable

* Campbell's Naval Hiſtory.

"globe,"

"globe." To the hardy deeds, the honourable enterprizes of our ſeamen, do we owe, that wherever the name of our country is mentioned, it is heard with reſpect for its friendſhip, and dread of its diſpleaſure. Theſe, theſe are the glorious trophies of maritime empire, the fruits of that dominion over the ſea, which was claimed by our anceſtors, the earlieſt inhabitants of this highly favoured iſland, and has been continued by an uninterrupted ſucceſſion of noble atchievements on that element, even to this auſpicious day, wherein our gracious Sovereign has piouſly commanded us to bleſs God, who is the giver of all victory, that the fleet of Britain can no-where meet with its equal.

To tell you of the heroes, whoſe valour and good conduct have been the happy inſtruments of thus ſupporting and advancing the glory of our nation, would be a pleaſing taſk; but, happy for my country, the catalogue is ſo long that there is not time for the enumeration: I muſt, however, be permitted to exult in this, that thoſe who ſtill remain in our ſervice are in nothing degenerated from their predeceſſors; but their names will deſcend to poſterity, together with thoſe whoſe illuſtrious characters have adorned our hiſtory before them.

When

When I ſpeak of the navy as the bulwark of our country, let it not be thought that I mean to derogate from the tribute of well merited praiſe due to thoſe brave men who have carried arms in our defence by land. Our ſoldiers have never yet diſgraced the ſervice of their country, nor have they ever been known to yield to equal numbers or ſimilar advantages; and it were eaſy to ſhow many inſtances wherein they have conquered, when in both reſpects the advantages were againſt them. It is needleſs to detain you with particulars, but no war have we ever engaged in, no battle have we ever fought, in which our ſoldiers have not ſhown themſelves equal to a prompt and manly execution of the hardieſt deeds.

But while with heartfelt joy we juſtly glory in the valour of our defenders by ſea and land, let us ever be mindful, whence theſe advantages originally proceed.

Almighty God who has given us this happy iſland to inhabit, and allotted us the honourable taſk of defending it, has for that purpoſe, from time to time, ſupplied our fleets and armies with hearts and hands fully adequate to the laudable duty. He it is who over-rules events; he it is that diſappoints the beſt-concerted ſchemes of our enemies;

enemies; confounds their devices againſt us, and turns their counſels, like that of Ahitophel, into fooliſhneſs. **Bleſſed therefore be the Lord our ſtrength, who teacheth our hands to war, and our fingers to fight: Our hope, and our fortreſs, our caſtle, and deliverer, our defender in whom we truſt.*

The royal Pſalmiſt, author of this paſſage, was ſo eminent in the art of war, that it is difficult to determine, whether he was more courageous as a ſoldier, or prudent and ſkilful as a general; yet he aſcribes the whole glory to God, on whoſe bleſſing and protection he knew depended the ſucceſs of his arms. †*I will not* (ſays that pious hero) *truſt to my bow; it is not my ſword that ſhall help me; but it is thou that ſaveſt us from our enemies, and putteſt them to confuſion that hate us.*

The enemies of David were in general the enemies of God; in as much as they refuſed to worſhip him, and ſet up deities of their own invention; abſurdly offering ſacrifice and adoration to images made by the hands of men: but if we weigh their demerits with thoſe of republican France, they will be found comparatively innocent.

They worſhipped falſe gods, not knowing the true: theſe on the other hand, having obtained

* Pſalm cxliv. 1. † Pſalm xliv. 9, 7.

the

the knowledge of the true God, and the * fundamental doctrines of Chriſt's religion, have forſaken his worſhip, blaſphemed his honour, aboliſhed his ſabbaths, traduced his ſacraments; and in a word, made every ſpecies of religious duty and moral obligation objects of general raillery and contempt, and even the ſubjects of jeſt and buffoonery in their unhallowed theatres and other places of public reſort.

If blind and ignorant heathens were counted enemies of God, becauſe not knowing his will they obeyed not his commandments, what ſhall we ſay of theſe men, who have wilfully ſhut their eyes againſt the light, to grope out their way like the blind at noon-day?

Surely the Lord is on our ſide, to puniſh their audacious impiety: to bring them to a ſenſe of their inſanity and guilt, and make them ſue for that peace they have ſo long diſturbed, and ſo inſolently rejected.

* Though the religion of France, like that of Rome, was in many things reprehenſible, as having departed from the purity and ſimplicity of the goſpel, yet the fundamental doctrines of Chriſtianity, as delivered in that form of ſound words, commonly called the Apoſtle's Creed, and received by the whole Chriſtian world, were never denied by papiſts: and therefore we hold them ſtill as a branch of the Catholic church, though a corrupt one.

The

The expenſive eſtabliſhments of a ſtate of war, the miſeries it creates, and the horrid effuſion of human blood which it occaſions, make it at all events a heavy calamity: but as we ſought not to enter into the preſent conteſt, till our enemies had provoked us by unparalleled outrage againſt heaven and earth; we have reaſon to hope that God will go forth with our armies by ſea and land, and crown them with victory wherever they ſhall meet the foe.

When I ſpeak of their outrages, let me recall a few of them to your recollection.

They declared open and perpetual war with all kings.

The deſtruction of ſovereigns was the purpoſe, the avowed determination of that lawleſs multitude, whom they dignified with the title of a National Aſſembly. They began with their own: and in a very ſhort time, their intrigues did ſo far prevail in other kingdoms, that we have great reaſon to believe, one ſovereign prince was * poiſoned, and another † aſſaſſinated by their means: and we know, that the pious and gracious prince, who ſo worthily fills the throne of theſe united kingdoms, though ſurrounded by wiſe and faithful counſellors, and almoſt adored by loyal and affectionate ſubjects,

* The Emperor of Germany. † The King of Sweden.

was

was hardly ſafe in the capital of his dominions, while their infernal partizans were allowed to ſhew their accurſed heads in our country.

Shall I mention the vile treachery, by which they gained ſuch an aſcendant in Holland, as obliged the Stadtholder to fly for ſafety from his dominions, and, by pretending to give the Dutch more perfect freedom, have moſt completely enſlaved and plundered them? Shall I ſpeak of their unjuſt aggreſſion of the Auſtrian Netherlands? Their perfidious invaſion of Switzerland? Their unlawful tyrannies in Italy? Their baſe hypocriſy to an infirm old man, whoſe eminent ſtation rendered him at leaſt reſpectable, to all but French perfidy? Shall I—But nature ſickens at the abominable recital, and bids me turn to a ſubject leſs diſguſting to humanity.

Let us then bleſs the Lord for his mercies to this our native land: that while other nations are groaning under the yoke of thoſe lawleſs invaders, or bleeding in their own country, in defence of their families, their property, and their religion, we live in quietneſs and peace; our trade flouriſhing, our manufactures thriving, our lives ſecure, our families enjoying the fruits of our labour, and our holy religion, exerciſed with full liberty of conſcience, free from interruption or innovation.

If political importance, national honour, or mi-

litary glory be the objects of our wiſhes, we may well be ſatisfied with the ſhare of them which we now enjoy. Our late brilliant ſucceſſes have ſet us at the head of the nations: the powers that have ſo long been oppreſſed by thoſe inhuman plunderers, look at this hour to Britain for deliverance: to the valour and the perſeverance of our country, they look, for emancipation from the unbounded tyranny of thoſe ſanguinary deſpots, whoſe delight is blood, and whoſe ambition plunder. We behold at this inſtant nations formerly in friendſhip with our enemies, and even thoſe at variance among themſelves, uniting with us and with each other, to fight under our ſtandard, and follow the lead of our heroic commanders.

What can a nation wiſh that we do not enjoy, if we knew but our own felicity, and had hearts to ſee and to be thankful for our mercies.

O! that there were ſuch an heart in us! That the hand of God might be with us, as it was of old with Judah, to give us one heart: to unite us in love to our God, in loyalty and obedience to the king, and all that are placed in authority under him, and ſhow by our pious, peaceable, and charitable lives, our juſt gratitude to the author of all our enjoyments: that it might be well with us and with our children for ever!

SER-

SERMON XXXI.

MATTH. v. 3, 4, &c.

Bleſſed are the poor in ſpirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven, &c.

IN order to the proper uſe of any means preſcribed, reference ſhould always be had to the end propoſed by them. The end which all mankind propoſe and wiſh to attain, is happineſs. The means, therefore, which are moſt likely and beſt adapted to produce that in the higheſt degree, ought to be the principal and chief concern of man.

This maxim, which is founded on reaſon and experience, our Saviour ſeems to have had in view, when he began to deliver that diſcourſe to his diſciples, of which the words I have read to you are the beginning.

He came into the world, not in the character of a mighty potentate, ſubduing nations to his dominion by arms, or diſplaying the enſigns of power

power and authority; but as a mild and beneficent teacher of righteouſneſs, and a gracious and condeſcending meſſenger of peace; and here we ſee his doctrine exactly correſponding with his benignant character.

Knowing that all men wiſh for happineſs, he begins his miniſtry, by ſhewing them the way by which they may attain it; and in order to recommend the virtues he preſcribes to their particular attention the more forcibly, he apportions to each the kind of felicity which God has annexed to the practice of it.

To illuſtrate the virtues he here ſets forth, and the ſeveral degrees of happineſs he aſcribes to each, is a work more ſuitable for a voluminous commentary than a ſingle diſcourſe, if it were done in ſuch a way as they deſerve and would admit of; but I truſt it may not be unprofitable, in the firſt place, briefly to conſider them in their order, and in the ſecond, to make ſome general remarks on them all.

The firſt bleſſing he pronounces, is upon the *poor in ſpirit*. Thoſe to whom this is addreſſed, are not thoſe who are poor in worldly circumſtances, or who are in a ſtate of indigence or beggary; nor thoſe who have renounced their eſtates, deſerted their poſt in ſociety, and run into cloy-

ſters

ſters and convents, and monaſtick vows, thinking thereby to increaſe their own merit; nor thoſe who ſpend their fortunes, in running about from place to place, to make converts to their enthuſiaſtic opinions, in oppoſition to thoſe who have been regularly bred and duly called to the miniſtry, agreeably to the appointment of Chriſt, and the eſtabliſhments adopted by national wiſdom: but the poor in ſpirit to whom Chriſt here ſpeaks, are thoſe who poſſeſs a true Chriſtian humility; which is not incompatible with even the moſt flouriſhing ſtate of outward circumſtances, any more than the worſt; as it conſiſts in a true and lively ſenſe of the infinite perfections of God, and a juſt and lowly eſtimation of ourſelves: this ſtands oppoſed to ſelf conceit and vain-glory in every degree, and teaches us to be modeſt in our eſtimate of ourſelves and our attainments, and cheerfully and humbly to ſubmit to the will of God in all events, endeavouring to obey and promote it in all we do.

This humility of diſpoſition is called *poverty of ſpirit*, becauſe the truly humble man has or perceives no good thing of his own: whatever good there is in him he aſcribes to the true cauſe, the grace of God: his evil only belongs to himſelf. Of this he is ſo ſenſible, that upon all occaſions, he

he is ready to deny himſelf, which is the firſt leſſon of Chriſtianity; for Chriſt ſays, in plain terms, * *If any man will follow me, let him deny himſelf.* He ſees and feelingly ackowledges, that of himſelf he is nothing, and can do nothing good, without the powerful influence of God's holy ſpirit: he ſees nothing in himſelf that can help, or ſave, or ſecure him; all his riches, all his hopes, all his life, and ſtrength, and power, and virtue, are in Jeſus Chriſt; and having nothing of his own to boaſt of, he is the truly poor in ſpirit, to whom belongs the kingdom of heaven.

By the *kingdom of heaven* in this paſſage, we are to underſtand the kingdom of the Meſſiah, the reign of Jeſus Chriſt, that kingdom of whoſe glory there ſhall be no end. In other words, it is the church of Chriſt eſtabliſhed upon earth, by calling the people to the faith and obedience of the goſpel, which is the only true way to that happineſs, which all men eagerly deſire, but which cannot be obtained but through him.

An admiſſion into this kingdom is only given to thoſe who are not lifted up by vain opinions of their own excellence, as if their ſuperior goodneſs and virtue deſerved the diſtinction; but who come

* Matth. xvi. 24.

to

to Chriſt, clothed with that humility and ſelf-denial which is here expreſſed by poverty of ſpirit.

Our Lord proceeds to ſay, ver. 4. *Bleſſed are they that mourn, for they ſhall be comforted.* Our Lord, you ſee, ſubjoins mourning to humility, as the effect to the cauſe. The humble man naturally comes to Chriſt, not boaſting of his merits, but confeſſing his ſins. Now the confeſſion of ſin is the acknowledgment of guilt, and this begets ſorrow and mourning for having ſinned, and is of courſe the next ſtep towards reformation. The mourners, therefore, who are here promiſed to be comforted, are they who with humble and contrite hearts, mourn for their ſins, and reſolve to forſake them.

From this text, ſome have concluded the neceſſity of perpetual mourning, and have fooliſhly or wickedly argued, that a Chriſtian ought not to take pleaſure in any thing in the world; but ſhould, as the prophet expreſſes it, be continually *afflicting his ſoul, go mourning all the day, and bow down his head like a bulruſh*: and there are not wanting thoſe, who upon this principle condemn all recreations, and every thing that can be called an amuſement, however lawful or innocent it may be. But beſides that the text is no juſt foundation for ſuch an inference, it is to be obſerved,

that

that mourning at any time, or at all times, cannot be of any uſe, unleſs it be done in order to a greater end: unleſs it tends to eſtabliſh us in the fear of God, that fear which is made perfect by love, to ſtrengthen our faith, confirm our repentance, turn us from ſin, and incline us to holineſs and virtue; to purify our minds from all worldly and carnal affections, and determine us to perſeverance in duty. This is that ſorrow ſo highly recommended by St. Paul to the * Corinthians, a ſorrow *working repentance to ſalvation, not to be repented of.*

To thoſe who mourn after this godly manner, is the divine promiſe made, that they ſhall be comforted. They ſhall be ſupported by the divine Spirit in all their trials, ſtrengthened againſt temptations, and finally made meet partakers of the heavenly comforts, and unſpeakable joys, prepared for the faithful ſervants of Chriſt; when † *God ſhall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there ſhall be no more death, neither ſorrow nor crying, neither ſhall there be any more pain: and they ſhall ſee his face, and his name ſhall be in their foreheads. And there ſhall be no light there, and they need no candle, neither light of the ſun; for the Lord God giveth them light; and they ſhall reign for ever and ever.*

Verſe 5. *Bleſſed are the meek; for they ſhall in-*

* 2 Cor. vii. 9, 10. † Rev. xxi. 4. xxii. 4, 5.

herit

herit the earth. Theſe words are evidently quoted from the xxxvii. Pſalm, and 11th verſe, where they relate to the quiet poſſeſſion of the land of Canaan; and we may obſerve, in what a remarkable manner this promiſe was made good, in this ſenſe of the words. After our Lord's reſurrection, the Jews who had not been converted to Chriſtianity, knowing that the time of the Meſſiah's appearance was come, and vainly expecting, that he was to deliver them from their preſent ſubjection to the Romans, became ſo turbulent and ſeditious, as to draw upon themſelves and their country, the reſentment of that powerful people, and the ruin of their city: whereas thoſe of their nation, who had been converted to embrace the faith of the meek and lowly Jeſus, and were formed to the quiet and peaceable temper of his religion, retired to Pella, before the Romans inveſted Jeruſalem, and after the ſiege was over, and the enemy departed, they returned and dwelt there in peace and tranquillity. The promiſe here made to the meek is, not that they ſhall inherit the whole earth, or that they ſhall enjoy great fortunes, or worldly power and grandeur, nor are theſe things their ordinary portion; but ſurely, in the natural courſe of events, a meek, quiet, and inoffenſive temper, one who ſtudies to give no offence, and who, when ill

treated and provoked, is eaſily reconciled; or, as the apoſtle expreſſes it, *gentle and eaſy to be entreated*, is moſt likely to poſſeſs the fruits of his eſtate, if he has one, or of his honeſt induſtry, if he has not, in peace and tranquillity; free from that ſtrife, anxiety, and trouble, which corrupt the enjoyment, and embitter the lives of turbulent, ambitious, and diſcontented mortals; and thus he inherits and enjoys his own portion of the earth in the very beſt ſenſe that the words convey.

Ver. 6. *Bleſſed are they* which do *hunger and thirſt after righteouſneſs, for they ſhall be filled.*

That is, bleſſed are they, who, under a juſt ſenſe of their own ſpiritual wants and defects, and of the excellence of religion, deſire above all things to be aſſiſted and inſtructed in their duty, and become truly pious and holy; and are as eager and active in this needful and eſſential purſuit, as in the gratification of thoſe natural appetites, hunger and thirſt. A deſire ſo earneſt, and withal ſo laudable, ſhall not be diſappointed: *They ſhall be filled.* They ſhall have all the means of grace afforded them, which are neceſſary to make them righteous, and the crown of righteouſneſs ſhall be their happy portion to all eternity*.

Ver.

* "I am very ſenſible of the extreme difficulty of defining "the preciſe ſenſe of this moſt important word δικαιοσυνη, and "its

Ver. 7. *Bleſſed are the merciful, for they ſhall obtain mercy.* The merciful temper proceeds from a compaſſionate heart, or an inward feeling of pity and ſympathy, at the ſight or hearing of the diſtreſs or misfortunes of others; which inclines us to relieve their wants, and alleviate their ſufferings, as far as our power extends, and their neceſſities require. No wonder that a diſpoſition ſo beneficent ſhould be highly recommended by the bleſſed Jeſus, who came into the world a proof of the greateſt mercy to mankind, whoſe whole religion is founded, carried on, and completed in mercy; and who therefore cannot be ſuppoſed otherwiſe than well affected, to thoſe who ſo nearly reſemble himſelf, in ſo prominent a feature of his character.

Thoſe who ſhow humanity and charity upon all proper occaſions, who are ready to forgive thoſe who have injured or provoked them, and do all

" its relatives, in each particular paſſage wherein they occur, " and with what modeſty, yea with what fear a poor fallible " man ſhould attempt the explanation of the words of the " Holy Ghoſt; of ſuch eſpecially as immediately and directly " relate to the TERMS OF MAN's ACCEPTANCE " WITH GOD." Parkhurſt under the word δικαιοσυνη.

Herein I perfectly agree with this excellent Lexicographer: but I humbly conceive, that the ſenſe I have given of righteouſneſs above muſt be that which our Lord meant to convey by the word in this paſſage; for I cannot conceive that in any other ſenſe his audience could underſtand him.

the

the good in their power to their fellow-creatures, are they to whom Chriſt has promiſed mercy in the text. He will procure them that mercy and compaſſion from others, of which they may at any time ſtand in need; and will finally ſhow mercy to them, at that awful day, when he ſhall judge the world in righteouſneſs, and when nothing but mercy can ſave.

Ver. 8. *Bleſſed are the pure in heart; for they ſhall ſee God.*

By purity of heart, we are to underſtand, an utter averſion and hatred, to all ſuch thoughts, paſſions, and deſires, as are repugnant to the law and will of God: for theſe are the parents of all ſin. And accordingly our Lord tells us in another place*, *That out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, theſts, falſe witneſs, blaſphemies; theſe are the things which defile a man.*

But here there is a diſtinction to be made between the *mind* and the *heart;* or, in other words, between the imagination and the affections. Thus, thoughts and ideas may be obtruded on the mind, by a variety of external cauſes, in which the affections are no way concerned, except ſo far as ſuch thoughts are entertained and encouraged by the

* Mat. xv. 19, 20.

will.

will. When ſuch as are ſinful occur in this manner, we are not to blame for them; it is our misfortune to be aſſaulted by them, becauſe they are capable of tempting us to ſin; but they do not make us criminal, while we give no conſent or approbation to them, nor yield to the ſins to which they would allure us. *Therefore* (ſays the Pſalmiſt) * *I hate vain thoughts*: and our church has taught us to pray againſt † all ſuch evil thoughts as may aſſault and hurt our ſouls.

There is great reaſon to ſuppoſe, that ſuch evil thoughts are frequently ſuggeſted by the enemy of our ſouls, as means of our ſeduction; and too often does the temptation ſucceed in drawing us aſide from the paths of duty. An exemption from theſe hoſtile attempts on our virtue, we are not to expect, nor would it be conſiſtent with a ſtate of probation; but the pure in heart will not encourage the temptation, but drive all ſuch wicked inſinuations from their minds, and turn their thoughts to better meditations, and then they will not fail to ſee God. They will ſee him in his glorious attributes of infinite power, wiſdom and goodneſs; they will ſee him in his wonderful works of creation and providence; and above all they will ſee him in his unparalleled mercy and loving kindneſs,

* Pſ. cxix. 113. † 2 Sun. Lent Col.

diſplayed

diſplayed in the redemption of mankind by Jeſus Chriſt; **who is made of God unto us wiſdom and righteouſneſs, and ſanctification, and redemption.*

Contemplations on theſe ſubjects will raiſe and exalt the ſoul above the mean and ſordid purſuits of ſenſe, and advance the pure in heart to ſtill higher degrees of purity, till at laſt they become fit for admiſſion into his glorious kingdom, and then they ſhall behold him as he is, and dwell in his preſence for ever.

Ver. 9. *Bleſſed are the peace-makers; for they ſhall be called the children of God.*

The word which is here tranſlated *peace-makers*, in ſtrictneſs of ſpeech, means thoſe who procure peace between contending parties, or perſons at variance: but in ſcripture it has a more extenſive ſenſe, and is equally applicable to ſuch as make peace with God and their own conſcience, or † who are the inſtruments of converting ſinners from the evil of their way. Theſe have the honourable privilege of being called the children of God, becauſe they reſemble his only begotten Son, who is the prince of peace; who came into the world

* 1 Cor. i. 30.

† Οἱ ἑτέρους ταζιαζοντας καταλασσομενοι, ὁι διὰ διδασκαλίας τους ἐχθρους τῳ Θεῳ ἐπιστρεφοντες, Εἰρηνοποιοὶ εἰσιν. Peace-makers are thoſe who reconcile others who are at variance, and thoſe who, by inſtruction, convert the enemies of God. Theophylact.

to

to give peace to mankind, who were at war with God, to publiſh peace upon earth, and good-will towards men; who invites all people, nations, and languages, all who labour and are heavy-laden, without diſtinction or reſpect of perſons, to come unto him and learn of him, that they may find peace with God, and reſt to their ſouls. He it was that broke down the partition wall which divided the jarring nations, and brought in that everlaſting righteouſneſs, whoſe diſtinguiſhing mark is unity of ſpirit in the bond of peace.

Thoſe, therefore, who would obtain the amiable character, intended by the term *peace-makers* in this ſcripture, are ſuch as have made peace with God and their own conſcience, who live quiet and peaceable lives, who give none offence deſignedly, and, from a principle of Chriſtian love and charity, endeavour to promote peace where they live, and reconcile contending neighbours.

Ver. 10. *Bleſſed are they which are perſecuted for righteouſneſs ſake; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

It is eaſy to ſee, that to be perſecuted for righteouſneſs ſake, is to be purſued and ill-treated, for holding doctrines which to us appear true, and doing ſuch actions as we hold to be our duty. Such doctrines, I mean, as God has revealed to us,

and

and ſuch duties as he has commanded us to practiſe. Bleſſed, then, ſays our Lord, are they whoſe firmneſs and integrity are ſuch that the fear, or even the experience of this ill treatment, cannot move them to aſſent to any falſe doctrine, or practiſe any thing contrary to the divine command; *for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

We may obſerve that this is the ſame reward as is promiſed, at the third verſe, to deep humility or poorneſs of ſpirit: and the reaſon is, becauſe the qualities to which the promiſe is annexed, ſo nearly reſemble each other.

Suffering for righteouſneſs ſake, is in truth an act of the greateſt humility which human nature can perform; eſpecially if it extends to dying for it. The man who can ſuffer death for righteouſneſs ſake, gives a proof of his humility, and at the ſame time of his integrity, that muſt forcibly impreſs the mind of every beholder: whoever can be brought to this muſt firſt have ſubdued every proud thought, every high imagination, and made all ſtoop to the croſs of Chriſt: he ſubmits his opinions to the faith of the goſpel, and for the hope *of things not ſeen*, denies himſelf in all the viſible comforts of this life; and foregoes even life itſelf, rather than let go his integrity.

Lower than this humility cannot go; and more glorious

glorious than in ſuch condeſcenſion, it cannot appear; and therefore eminently to ſuch does the kingdom of heaven belong. * *They ſhall riſe and reign with Chriſt* (ſays St. John) *in the firſt reſurrection.*

Now theſe bleſſings, which are in number eight, have obtained the general title of the eight beatitudes in the church; becauſe they contain the principal articles wherein the ſpiritual happineſs of man conſiſts.

Having conſidered them ſeparately, though as briefly as I could, and explained them as I hope intelligibly, I proceed, as I propoſed in the ſecond place, to make ſome general remarks on them all.

Firſt, then, I would obſerve, that if any part of the New Teſtament deſerves a more particular and ſerious attention than the reſt, it is this diſcourſe of our Saviour; for in this, more perhaps than in any other of his diſcourſes, he appears to have ſpoken as never man ſpake before him. The wiſeſt teachers of philoſophy previous to his time were divided, embarraſſed, and uncertain, concerning the moſt important enquiry that can poſſibly occupy the human mind; namely, the chief good of man†; which all the philoſophers were employed in labouring to aſcertain, without being

* Rev. xx. 4, 5.

† Summum bonum.

able to acquire ſatisfaction themſelves, or give it to others. This he has ſettled in a few ſhort ſentences, ſpoken with ſuch ſtrength of reaſon, and ſuch elegant ſimplicity of language, as at once to inform the ignorant and ſatisfy the learned. From theſe we learn that the chief happineſs of a rational creature is the enjoyment of the divine favour, and are at the ſame time inſtructed how this ineſtimable bleſſing is to be obtained; that is, by exerciſing virtues which the world neglected or deſpiſed, and which in the world's eſtimate rendered men moſt miſerable.

II. The bleſſings promiſed to the ſeveral virtues here commended, though expreſſed in different words, all mean the ſame thing; namely, perfect happineſs in the next life, and as much of it in this as is conſiſtent with a ſtate of probation; and hence we may infer, that though the language is varied for the ſake of elegance, and in order to command the attention of the hearer or reader, yet it is not ſuppoſed, that any of them can be poſſeſſed in any eminent degree where the reſt are wanting. Thus the humble, the penitent, and the meek, muſt be thoſe who hunger and thirſt after righteouſneſs, and ſtrive to become eminent in piety and holineſs; and none but the pure in heart, whoſe ſouls are raiſed above the mean tricks

and

and ſordid purſuits of worldly minds, and who are free from guile and hypocriſy, can be ſuppoſed capable of ſuffering for righteouſneſs ſake. Thus it is always reaſonable to ſuppoſe, that whoever is careful in any one of theſe will not be deficient in the reſt of their duty.

To underſtand our Saviour's diſcourſe otherwiſe, would be to pervert his meaning, and fall into a miſtake which he has ſeverely cenſured in the Jews of his time, and which proved ſo fatal to their morality; which was, that a ſtrict and punctual obſervance of one precept of the law was a ſufficient excuſe for the neglect of others, or even for the practice of ſome favourite vice: and this being generally ſome ritual and ſhowy inſtitution, which looked well in the eyes of men, they were contented, at the price of this punctuality, to neglect matters of greater importance. Thus we find the Phariſee in the parable, highly valuing himſelf upon faſting twice in the week, and giving tithes of all that he poſſeſſed: and ſo ſcrupulous were the Jews with reſpect to the law of tithes, that even mint, aniſe, and cumin, herbs of little value, and ſeldom cultivated in large quantities, were not * overlooked; while they would ſqueeze

* The reaſon which made the Phariſees ſo very ſcrupulous in theſe matters, was that they *truſted in themſelves that they were*

ſqueeze the laſt farthing from a poor debtor, and even diſtrain the fatherleſs and widow, to ſatisfy their avarice.

Not ſo has Chriſt inſtructed his diſciples. He treats us as we are, frail and fallible creatures; and as he knows we are liable to ſin, he holds out pardon to our repentance; but, though he does not expect our obedience to be ſinleſs and unerring, he requires it to be ſincere and univerſal: * *for whoſoever ſhall break one of his leaſt commandments, and teach men ſo, he ſhall be called the leaſt in the kingdom of heaven.* He ſhall be of no eſtimation in the church of Chriſt, nor can he poſſibly enter into his glory.

III. We ſee here what ſort of perſons our Lord accounts bleſſed: but it is to be feared, that too many, who profeſs to have his doctrines in high veneration, do not make the ſame eſtimate of human happineſs as he does. They acknowledge generally the truth of all he taught, and are ready to own the rectitude of all his deciſions; but by an illuſion too common, they entertain in their

were righteous (δικαιοι), *i. e.* righteous of themſelves, by their own partial obſervance of the *moral*, and a rigid ſtrictneſs in the *ceremonial* law: by the outward performance of whoſe expiations and ordinances, they hoped to procure forgiveneſs, for ſuch breaches of duty as they might commit. See Rom. x. 3, &c.

* Ver. 19.

hearts,

hearts, and ſhow by their conduct, ſentiments not reconcileable to this acknowledgment. They cannot conceive how the man that is poor in ſpirit, meek and humble, detached from the world, and indifferent to its pains and pleaſures, and ſuffering, if need be, for the ſake of Chriſt, can be happy. But this is becauſe they miſtake both the nature of true happineſs, and the way to attain it.

He who ſets his affections upon the world and the things of the world, takes the ſure way to render himſelf miſerable. Where ſo many contending rivals have entered the liſts, he muſt not look for uninterrupted ſucceſs; and being not exempted from the evils of life, or the viciſſitudes of fortune, diſappointments muſt vex him, calamities wound him, and the proſpect of death ſerves to embitter all his enjoyments: It is true indeed, that the religious man is not exempt from caſualties and misfortunes, any more than he: but ſeeing them in a different point of view, they affect him not ſo deeply. He conſiders this world not as his ultimate object: his views are not confined to the chequered ſcene which it exhibits; and though he may feel afflictions with exquiſite ſenſibility, and the tears of ſorrow may bedew his cheeks, yet the ſweet conſolations of religion, his ſteady affiance in the mercy and good providence of God,

will

will ſupport him under the ſevereſt trials, and comfort his ſoul even in the moſt afflictive diſpenſations. *In the multitude of the ſorrows that I had in my heart, thy comforts have refreſhed my ſoul*, ſays the * Pſalmiſt, and well he might ſay ſo, becauſe, as he afterwards adds, † *The Lord is my refuge, and my God is the ſtrength of my confidence.* This truſt and confidence in his God, ariſing from the humble conſciouſneſs of a conſtant endeavour to obey his commands, could cheer him in the gloomieſt hour, and infuſe into his ſoul a joy unknown to tranſgreſſors.

Laſtly, I wiſh you to obſerve, that all the virtues here recommended as means of obtaining bleſſedneſs, are ſtrictly moral, and ſeveral of them ſocial virtues. By ſocial virtues, I would be underſtood to mean, ſuch as tend to promote the good of our fellow creatures, with whom we live in ſociety; ſuch are, humility, righteouſneſs, the merciful temper, and the love of peace. How much then are they to blame, who cenſure the miniſters of the goſpel, for recommending the moral virtues to their people? How far are they removed from the ſpirit of Chriſt's religion, who find fault with this, as a departing from the doctrine of faith and

* Pſal. xciv. 19. † Ver. 22.

grace,

grace, and preaching legal or * heathen morality, beneath the dignity of enlightened believers? who blame us for not preaching the pure goſpel of Chriſt, when we preach what Chriſt himſelf preached? who ſlanderouſly traduce us, as if we were enemies to the croſs of Chriſt, becauſe we recommend the practice of the ſocial and relative duties of life, and urge the neceſſity of thoſe good works, which our Lord ſays, in this very chapter, ought to be ſeen of men, that others may be induced to glorify God, by imitating thoſe virtues which they behold in our converſation?

If we take the apoſtles of Chriſt for our models, we ſhall find them every-where urging good works as neceſſary to ſalvation, and no encouragement given for the hope of eternal life to any but thoſe who practiſe them. Quotations to this purpoſe from their epiſtles might be multiplied without end; but it may be ſufficient at preſent to mention the rules laid down by St. Paul to Titus for preaching the goſpel, which are found in the ſecond and third chapters of his epiſtle; where, after charging him to ſpeak the things which become ſound doctrine, he proceeds to tell him what thoſe

* I recollect having read a book many years ago, in which Archbiſhop Tillotſon is called on this account a heathen moraliſt.

things

things were; and in this, he gives him a long liſt of relative and ſocial virtues, and nothing elſe; concluding the ſecond chapter with theſe remarkable words: *Theſe things ſpeak and exhort, and rebuke with all authority: let no man deſpiſe thee.*

That Paul was well qualified to inſtruct Titus in his dtuy, will not probably be diſputed. That he did fully inſtruct him before, and at his appointing him biſhop of the church of Crete, cannot reaſonably be doubted: but leſt any of his verbal precepts might have ſlipped from his memory, he writes him this epiſtle (that he might have it before him to refer to, upon every occaſion), which completes the charge given him at his ordination, and which contains little more than repeated exhortations, to diligence in preaching good works of every kind to his people. * *This* (ſays he) *is a faithful ſaying, and theſe things I will that thou affirm conſtantly, that they which have believed in God, might be careful to maintain good works: theſe things are good and profitable unto men.* How dangerous then muſt be the deluſion of thoſe miſtaken teachers, who would decry morality as derogatory to the faith of Chriſt? And how dreadful the ſituation of thoſe poor deluded ſouls, who are miſled by them.

* Chap. iii. 8.

Thanks

Thanks be to God we have not ſo learned Chriſt. His religion, as contained in the New Teſtament, gives no countenance to a ſpeculative, idle, and unfruitful faith; but teaches us to live ſoberly, righteouſly, and godly; to do the ſeveral duties of our reſpective ſtations, and to paſs the time of our ſojourning here in the fear of God, and unremitting obedience to his commands. Bleſſed are they who ſincerely continue in ſo doing; * *who are undefiled and walk in the law of the Lord, who keep his teſtimonies, and ſeek him with all their heart; for they ſhall not be aſhamed when they have reſpect unto all his commandments.*

* Pſal. cxix. 1, 2. 6.

SERMON XXXII.

Preached on the preparation previous to the adminiſtration of the Lord's Supper.

DEUT. xii. 32.

What thing ſoever I command you, obſerve to do it: thou ſhalt not add thereto, nor diminiſh from it.

THIS book of Deuteronomy derives its name from a compound word in the Greek language, which ſignifies a repetition or ſecond delivering of the law; becauſe herein Moſes makes a ſummary recapitulation of all the laws given to the Iſraelites, ſince their deliverance out of Egypt.

This method he makes uſe of, in order by the repetition to inculcate the precepts he had formerly delivered with pious exhortations, inforce them with proper and perſuaſive arguments, and, by the brevity of his ſtyle and manner, bring them more within the compaſs of their memory.

They were now on the borders of the land of Canaan, and the time was at hand when they were

were to paſs over Jordan, and take poſſeſſion of it; for we are told in the firſt chapter, that it was in the eleventh month of the fortieth year of their ſojourning in the wilderneſs, that the words of this book began to be ſpoken to them.

This wiſe legiſlator, well knowing the treachery of human memory, and eſpecially how apt men are to forget or neglect ſuch precepts as enjoin difficult or diſagreeable duties, employed this laſt period of his life, in briefly repeating to his people, as it were in abridgement, what he had formerly taught them more at large. And particularly in this xii^th. chapter, having cautioned them reſpecting ſeveral particulars in the manner and form of their ſacrifices and other acts of worſhip, he gives them in the words of our text, a ſtrict charge, to perform thoſe duties he had taught them, in the manner he had commanded, without making any additions of their own contrivance or fancy; or diminiſhing or curtailing the ſervice, by the neglect of any rite or ceremony that had been preſcribed.

Thus the words, taken in their primary and moſt obvious meaning, are a direct command to receive the word of God juſt as it is, without preſuming to make more or leſs of it than what it really contains; and this is a rule frequently repeated

peated in the ſacred writings, and to which no exception is made in any caſe.

He who takes upon him to add any thing to the ſacred oracles, and endeavours to paſs it upon mankind for the word of God, when God has not ſpoken or revealed it to him, juſtly incurs the cenſure which Ezekiel the prophet paſſes on thoſe of his time, who ſaid, *the Lord ſaith it, albeit he hath not ſpoken;* and he who ſhall deny the authority of any part of the holy ſcriptures, and endeavour to cancel or ſuppreſs it, merits the name of an infidel and apoſtate.

To ſet this matter in a fuller light, we ſay in the firſt place, it is a breach of the injunction in the text, for any man to ſubſtitute any contrivance or invention of his own, in the room of that which God has preſcribed in his worſhip, when ſuch preſcription is plain and expreſs. Of this we have an example, in the ſtory of Nadab and Abihu the ſons of Aaron, who took common fire in their cenſers to burn incenſe before the Lord, whereas by the law it ſhould have been taken from the altar, where the ſacred fire, which was at firſt miraculouſly kindled, was kept continually burning for religious purpoſes. Hence it is called ſtrange fire, Levit. x. and though it conſumed the incenſe as effectually as the ſacred fire would have done,

done, yet thoſe men periſhed in the very act of uſing it; becauſe they had taken it contrary to the expreſs command of God.

Secondly, by virtue of the injunction in the text, we are bound to take heed, that we do not interpret any portion of ſcripture, to ſuch a ſenſe as to pervert it from its true meaning and intention. By thus wreſting the ſcriptures, it was that the Jews in our Saviour's time incurred that high cenſure of making vain the commandments through their traditions, and rendering the word of God ineffectual, by mixing with it the commandments of men. For by ſo doing they ſet aſide his authority, and aſſumed it to themſelves, in order to ſupport their own deſigns and opinions. And the ſame is the misfortune of all who are miſled by falſe doctrines: they are defrauded of ſo much of the genuine ſenſe of God's word as is miſinterpreted to them; and miſled into the belief of ſuch things as he never revealed, or meant to be believed. Thus, inſtead of bread they receive a ſtone, and in the room of a fiſh are put off with a ſerpent.

Thirdly, by theſe words we are ſtrictly prohibited from pretending that any thing is a divine command, which is really not ſo. This was another error of the Phariſees in our Saviour's time,

time, who held the opinions of their rabbies, which he calls the commandments of men, in preference to the plain precepts of the divine law. Thus particularly, in the inſtance of ſupporting indigent parents, they maintained that putting their money into the treaſury, which was but a human inſtitution, was a ſufficient excuſe for not performing that duty; though they allowed it was a part of the honour plainly enjoined under the fifth commandment.

Thus far then the words of the text are to us and to all the world, a ſacred and inviolable rule, to receive the word of God as it is, and interpret it according to its genuine ſenſe and meaning; to maintain its truth and integrity, that it may be to us as it is meant to be, an everlaſting and copious fountain of true doctrine, and a never-failing direction for purity and holineſs of life. In this reſpect the law of God is perfect, and men muſt not preſume to leſſen the perfection of it, by adding to it or diminiſhing from it.

But though we muſt not add any thing to the word of God, or detract any thing from it, pretending that any ſuch alteration is of divine appointment, yet where the Lord hath not ſpoken, I mean in ſuch things as may be left to human prudence and diſcretion, the lawful magiſtrates, and

and the governors of the church lawfully appointed, have an undoubted right to order and appoint ſuch obſervances, as are neceſſary and convenient for edification, and external decorum in the public worſhip: and to take care that every thing be done decently and in order: and ſo far as their commands are not in oppoſition, or contrary to the word of God, it becomes the duty of their people to comply with them. In the mean time, however, we muſt be careful to diſtinguiſh between the commandments of God, and thoſe which proceed only from human authority; and never pretend that any thing is of the former kind, which is really of the latter. Thus we find under the Jewiſh economy, that only three feſtivals, or times of more ſolemn devotion, were appointed in the law of God: theſe were the Paſſover, the Feaſt of Weeks, and that of Tabernacles; yet they thought it no way unlawful or improper, to add to theſe the Feaſt of the Dedication of the Temple, and that of Purim, though neither could pretend to any higher authority than that of the high prieſt or civil magiſtrate. So under the Chriſtian diſpenſation we meet with no poſitive command of our Lord, for changing the Sabbath from the laſt to the firſt day of the week; but from the example of the apoſtles, and that of the primitive church,

church, we think ourſelves fully juſtified in continuing the practice.

Again, the Jews were commanded to eat the Paſſover, with their ſhoes on their feet, their loins girded, and their ſtaves in their hands; but when in proceſs of time this cuſtom was found inconvenient, they thought it no infringement on the command to eat it as they did other meals, ſitting or leaning upon couches, and habited in their uſual dreſs: and as our Saviour complied with this cuſtom, it is evident that they ſinned not in making this alteration.

So in receiving the holy ſacrament of the body and blood of Chriſt, the ſcripture has no-where directed us to any particular poſture or poſition of body, in that devout and ſolemn act; but as we ought, by every poſſible mark of humility and devotion, to expreſs the proper poſture of our ſouls at ſuch a time, it has been thought a decent and becoming practice to receive the memorials of our Saviour's paſſion, in ſuch a poſture as is beſt calculated outwardly to expreſs the inward humility and ſelf-abaſement with which we ought to appear before God in this ſolemn ordinance. We therefore receive the ſacrament * *meekly kneeling upon our knees*: and as this is no way contrary to

* See the office.

any

any thing which our Lord or his apoſtles have ſaid concerning it, we are ſurely not to blame, for continuing a practice ſo well recommended by the directions of the venerable fathers of our church, and the reſpectable example of antiquity: for ſurely it is but reaſonable, to allow the Chriſtian church the like power in matters of this nature, as that of the Jews, while her mandates are conſiſtent with thoſe of ſuperior obligation.

But it has been objected to this form, that it too much reſembles the practice of the church of Rome, in kneeling to the conſecrated elements, whenever the prieſt thinks proper to hold them up in ſight of the people.

To this I anſwer in the firſt place, that if the practice of the church of Rome in any thing be really good, there would be no good reaſon why we ſhould not follow it: for that which is good in itſelf, cannot be made bad to me by other people's approbation of it; but in this inſtance the objection proceeds upon a miſtake altogether.

In the church of Rome, whatever remains of the conſecrated bread, or rather wafer (for they do not uſe common bread), is reſerved in a box or pix, as a charm againſt witchcraft, infectious diſeaſes, and violent temptations; and carried in proceſſion, to extinguiſh fires, and cure the ſick;

and as the people are taught to believe, that the real body and blood of Chriſt are contained in that box, they are required to pay divine adoration to it wherever they happen to meet it.

Such ſuperſtitious vanities, ſuch blaſphemous idolatries, belong not to us; and God forbid they ever ſhould! They were introduced at firſt into that corrupt communion, together with other dangerous errors, by the artifice of deſigning prieſts, who made no ſmall advantage of the ignorance of the world, in thoſe ages when ſuch innovations were made*. But at the happy period of the reformation, when reaſon had reſumed her proper ſphere, and the cultivation of learning had prepared the minds of men for the revival of the pure and unadulterated doctrine of Chriſtianity; the wicked and fooliſh rites and doctrines of ſuperſtition were detected and expoſed, and the venerable form of pure and undefiled religion exhibited in all her native elegance and beauty. With reſpect to the matter we are now ſpeaking of, particular care has been taken by the pious fathers of our church, not only to correct the errors of the times of ignorance and ſuperſtition, but to remove all poſſible miſtakes or ſcruples on the ſubject, from whatever quarter or whatever motives they might

* Council of Lateran in the year 1215.

ariſe;

ariſe; by a wiſe and well-intended rubric, written expreſsly on the ſubject. It is to be found in all your books of common Prayer, at the end of the office for the holy communion; notwithſtanding which, I ſhall think it no waſte of your time to rehearſe it now in your hearing.

"Whereas it is ordained in this office for the "adminiſtration of the Lord's Supper, that the "communicants ſhall receive the ſame kneel-"ing; (which order is well meant for a ſignifi-"cation of our humble and grateful acknowledg-"ment of the benefits of Chriſt therein given to "all worthy receivers, and for the avoiding of "ſuch profanation and diſorder in the holy com-"munion, as might otherwiſe enſue;) yet leſt the "ſame kneeling ſhould by any perſons, either out "of ignorance and infirmity, or out of malice and "obſtinacy, be miſconſtrued and depraved, it is "here declared, that thereby no adoration is in-"tended or ought to be done, either unto the ſa-"cramental bread or wine there bodily received, "or unto any corporeal preſence of Chriſt's natural "fleſh and blood. For the ſacramental bread "and wine remain ſtill in their very natural ſub-"ſtances, and therefore may not be adored; (for "that were idolatry to be abhorred of all faithful "Chriſtians:) and the natural body and blood of

"our

" our Saviour Chriſt are in heaven, and not here; it " being againſt the truth of Chriſt's natural body, " to be at one time in more places than one."

After all this, it is highly diſingenuous in our adverſaries to charge us with idolizing the conſecrated elements, or with any tendency to ſuperſtition or will-worſhip, in the humble and devout attitude in which we receive them; for all the ſtreſs we lay upon the matter, is, that as we are ſuppoſed to receive the Holy Sacrament, praying for the forgiveneſs of our ſins, and duly praiſing God, for the redemption wrought for us by the death and paſſion of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, which we therein commemorate, we do it in that humble frame of ſpirit, and that reſpectful outward demeanour, with which it becomes poor ſinful creatures to approach their creator, in all the ſolemn ordinances of religious worſhip.

Indeed I have always obſerved, that the moſt material objections, either to the doctrine or diſcipline of our church, have proceeded from ignorance of our principles; which, if they were better known, would, I am perſuaded, be more generally approved.

The forms of public worſhip in different churches, being left to the diſcretion of human wiſdom, may certainly vary at different times and

places;

places; and accordingly we find the ancient liturgies, even of thoſe churches which the apoſtles themſelves and their immediate ſucceſſors had planted, though all in perfect agreement as to points of eſſential importance, yet, in words and forms and matters of leſſer moment, differing in ſeveral reſpects. But in this they all agreed, and we agree with them all, that our chief care in all our approaches to God ſhould be, to bring with us ſincere and honeſt hearts; that we come into his preſence with devout and compoſed minds, undiſtracted with carnal affections and worldly cares, and leaving all inferior concerns behind us, fix our hearts and our affections upon God, in whoſe preſence we are, and in whoſe ſervice we are engaged. If we come to him thus prepared: if our ſouls are devoutly and piouſly diſpoſed to meet our creator in the ordinances of our holy religion, there is no fear but our outward demeanor will be ſuch as not to give offence either to God or any reaſonable man.

Upon the whole, wherever any thing is left to human diſcretion, it is ſuppoſed that there diſcretion may be lawfully exerciſed; but whatever is declared in ſcripture to be the will of God, admits of no change or alteration. I have been led to

treat

treat on this ſubject by the conſideration of the holy ſeaſon at which we are now arrived.

To-morrow (if it pleaſe God) we are to meet the Lord in the ſacred ordinance of his laſt ſupper, to commemorate the ſignal act of divine love by which he is become the Saviour of the world. Let us be careful that we perform this duty with proper views and diſpoſitions. Let us remember, that he * *requires truth in the inward parts;* † *that he hath no pleaſure in wickedneſs; neither ſhall evil dwell with him.*

Sincerity is the glory of a true believer. With this we may come boldly to the throne of grace, with our hearts ſprinkled from an evil conſcience: but without it, our approaches will be but preſumption, and our ſervices deſpiſed and diſregarded.

May God give us grace ſo to prepare our hearts for his ſervice, as that we may hope for acceptance, through the merits and mediation of Jeſus Chriſt our Lord. Amen.

* Pſal. li. 6. † Pſal. v. 4.

SER-

SERMON XXXIII.

1 SAMUEL ii. 20.

And Eli bleſſed Elkanah and his wife, and ſaid, The Lord give thee ſeed of this woman for the loan which is lent to the Lord.

THIS firſt book of Samuel is generally by commentators ſuppoſed to be written by the prophet himſelf; which is indeed no unreaſonable ſuppoſition, from the very particular account which we have in the beginning of it, of his parentage, birth, and education; the two firſt of which he had probably learned from his parents, while he continued in his father's houſe, or afterwards when they paid him their annual viſit at Shiloh, where he miniſtered in the tabernacle under Eli the prieſt.

His mother Hannah had been married ſome years, but had no children. On this account it probably was, that Elkanah married a ſecond wife,

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wife, which by the Jewiſh law he was allowed to do, and by her had children as he wiſhed.

The want of children was matter of great regret to all Jews, becauſe, ever ſince the promiſe made to Abraham, every Jew thought he ſtood an even chance of being predeceſſor to the Meſſiah. The being cut off therefore from this high object of their ambition, was among them counted a reproach: but what made it more particularly afflictive in the caſe of Hannah, was, that the other wife of Elkanah, who bore him children, continually reviled and ſlighted her for her barrenneſs. The huſband, however, did all he could to comfort Hannah, and took all opportunities to ſhew her particular marks of affection and kindneſs; eſpecially when he went up with his family to Shiloh at the feſtivals, as his cuſtom was; when he divided portions of the free-will offering to his family, he eminently diſtinguiſhed Hannah in the diſtribution. But the reproaches and harſh uſage of Peninna had ſo diſtreſſed and diſpirited her, that ſhe had no appetite either to eat or drink.

On one of thoſe occaſions, ſhe aroſe from the table, and in great ſorrow went to the tabernacle, where ſhe earneſtly prayed to God, that he would grant her a man child; vowing at the ſame time, that if her prayer was heard, ſhe would dedicate

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the child to God for the ſervice of his houſe, and that he ſhould be a Nazarite all his days.

The term Nazarite is taken from a Hebrew * word which ſignifies to diſtinguiſh or ſeparate, and we learn what the nature of their ſeparation was in the ſixth of Numbers, where we are told, that it conſiſted of theſe three particulars:

1. In that the perſons ſo devoted drank no wine.

2. In that they did not ſhave their heads, but let their hair grow.

3. In avoiding to touch or even approach a dead body, which they held a defilement.

This ſeparation was of two kinds, the one temporary, the other for life. To this laſt Hannah vowed to dedicate the child, for whom in her grief and vexation ſhe prayed to the Lord.

It is worth obſerving here that Hannah's prayer and her vow were performed as acts of perſonal and private devotion: for Eli, who at that time preſided in the tabernacle, obſerving her, and ſeeing the motion of her lips, but hearing no voice, imagined that ſhe had drank too much wine, and charged her with intoxication. But her mild and reſpectful anſwer ſoon convinced him of his miſtake; and her pathetic remonſtrance

* Nazar.

induced him to diſmiſs her with this pious and affectionate benediction: *Go in peace: and the God of Iſrael grant thee thy petition that thou haſt aſked of him.*

Comforted by the good man's bleſſing ſeconding her own prayer, ſhe returned to her lodging, and ate and drank with cheerfulneſs. The ſacred text ſays, her countenance was no more ſad.

In this caſe, no doubt, ſhe derived comfort from her faith, and accordingly God was pleaſed to hearken to her petition, and gave her power to conceive and bring forth a ſon, whom ſhe named Samuel; which ſignifies *aſked of God.* This child ſhe ſuckled, and afterwards carefully educated, till he was fit to be preſented in the tabernacle, and capable of receiving inſtruction in the ſervice of it under Eli*. She then brought him to Shiloh, and preſented him to Eli, aſſuring him this was the child for whom ſhe had prayed at ſuch a time, and that ſhe was now come to fulfil the vow ſhe had then made, by dedicating him to the ſervice of God's houſe, ſo long as the Lord ſhould think proper to continue him in it.

* Joſephus ſays this happened when Samuel was twelve years old, which is not improbable, that being the age at which all male children were uſually preſented in the tabernacle, and afterwards in the temple. See Luke ii. 42.

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The character of this pious woman well deſerves the place in ſacred hiſtory which it occupies; for the ſake of thoſe inſtructive obſervations it ſuggeſts; ſome of which therefore ſhall employ the remainder of this diſcourſe.

Firſt, then, in Hannah we ſee the reward of ſanctity and temperance. An ancient Chriſtian writer * ſays, that her temperance qualified her to be the mother of ſo great a prophet as Samuel. Nor is this the only inſtance, where the virtues, and eſpecially the temperance of women is recorded, as a previous qualification for their producing great and extraordinary perſons. The mother of Sampſon was commanded to abſtain from wine and ſtrong drink while with child of him. The parents of John the Baptiſt, as St. Luke tells us, were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments of the Lord blameleſs. And the mother of our bleſſed Lord had the high honour of being made ſuch, on account of her unſpotted purity and virtue. I do not ſay that virtue is hereditary, or that pious parents may not have profligate children; but I may ſafely ſay, that if parents wiſh their children to become virtuous, they ought to ſet them the example.

* Tertullian.

Secondly,

Secondly, We may ſee in Hannah the fruits of a patient faith and truſt in God. She had for years continued childleſs, which was by all her nation counted a reproach, and a great misfortune; and therefore we can hardly doubt but ſhe prayed continually to God to grant her a child. The requeſt was not preſently granted, yet ſhe continued to pray; and at laſt her prayers prevailed, and her wiſhes were accompliſhed, to her great conſolation and full ſatisfaction. Had ſhe failed in her aſſiduities, and not continued inſtant in her prayers, ſhe had probably been denied her requeſt; as is the caſe with many, who very earneſtly put up their petitions at firſt, but becauſe they do not find them immediately anſwered in the way they deſire, grow weary of their devotions, and ſo miſs their aim altogether. It were well if we would learn from hence to truſt in the mercy of God in all our exigencies, perſevere in honeſt and juſt petitions, and wait for his time, who beſt knows when and how to *fulfil the deſires and petitions of his ſervants, as may be moſt expedient for them.*

By the parable of the unjuſt judge, and other portions of ſcripture, we learn that God is pleaſed with the frequency and continuance of our prayers; and though, for wiſe reaſons beſt known to himſelf, he frequently exerciſes the patience of his

his ſervants, by delaying to anſwer their petitions immediately, yet * *the poor ſhall not always be forgotten: the patient abiding of the meek ſhall not periſh for ever.*

Thirdly, In Hannah we ſee the advantage of a meek and quiet ſpirit, which can bear with inſults and indignities, without returning the injury. She was deſtined to live under the ſame roof with a woman, who frequently, perhaps daily, vilified and reproached her for what ſhe could not help; yet all this did not move her to brawling or ſtrife, nor to diſturb the peace of the family, as ſome women in ſuch circumſtances would have done; ſhe bore all with patience, and committed her cauſe to God, in whoſe power are all his creatures, and who ſhe knew can, whenever he ſees fit, † *make the barren woman to keep houſe, and to be a joyful mother of children.* This temper procured her the particular love and attachment of her huſband, who for the meek and quiet ſpirit that was in her, and the invincible good humour with which ſhe preſerved the peace of his family, loved her more than his other wife who bore him children.

This happy diſpoſition it was, that alſo obtained her the favour and benediction of Eli the prieſt; for when he charged her with drunkenneſs, and

* Pſalm ix. 18.

† Pſalm cxiii. 9.

in

in menacing language bid her begone and get quit of her wine, ſhe did not fly out in angry or reproachful words at his unjuſt ſuſpicion, but in the humble, yet eloquent ſtyle of meekneſs and innocence, * *Hannah anſwered and ſaid, No my Lord; I am a woman of a ſorrowful ſpirit; I have drunk neither wine nor ſtrong drink, but have poured out my ſoul before the Lord. Count not thine handmaid for a daughter of Belial: for out of the abundance of my complaint and grief have I ſpoken hitherto.* This modeſt and pathetic reply had its effect on the heart of Eli; and hard indeed muſt that heart have been, if it had not. The good man perceiving his miſtake, and retracting the error of an unfounded cenſure, in pity to her diſtreſs, and charitable feeling for her pious ſolicitude, diſmiſſed her with an affectionate prayer for her ſucceſs. Go (ſaid he) *go in peace: and the God of Iſrael grant thee thy petition that thou haſt aſked of him.*

It does not appear, that Eli knew exactly what he prayed for; but ſeeing the piety of her demeanour, and touched with the delicate ſenſibility and dejection of ſpirit, which he could not but perceive, he naturally concluded, that her prayer muſt be reaſonable, and conſequently fit for the divine mercy

* Chap. i. 15, 16.

to

to grant; and therefore in his ſacerdotal character prayed with her and for her, that their joint ſupplications might reach the throne of grace together, as the nature of his office intitled him to do. Their united prayers were accepted, and Hannah, in due time, became the joyful mother of a ſon.

But mark the conduct of this godly matron afterwards. Determined to fulfil the vow ſhe had made, ſhe took the beſt poſſible method to make it effectual: ſhe did not commit her child to the care of ſtrangers, or venal domeſtics; ſhe ſuckled him herſelf, and educated him alſo till he came of age to be preſented in the tabernacle: and ſo ſedulouſly did ſhe attend to this duty, that for the ſake of it ſhe forbore to accompany her huſband to Shiloh at the feſtivals, as had been her former cuſtom. As ſhe had vowed to dedicate her ſon to the ſervice of God, ſhe reſolved to qualify him for it, by a virtuous education under her own eye; that by inſtilling good principles into his mind, while young and tractable, he might be duly prepared for a higher form of inſtruction, under a maſter properly qualified for the purpoſe. And well it were, if mothers in general would follow the example here ſet them; if inſtead of truſting the care of their children to ignorant and careleſs hirelings,

hirelings, no ways intereſted in their proſperity, they would undertake the honourable charge of training their young and tender minds to virtuous habits; would watch their childiſh inclinations, and try to turn their different tempers and opening diſpoſitions to the beſt account: rearing them to the practice of truth, integrity, and religion. The good effects of their laudable attention would adorn the riſing generation, and the works of ſuch mothers could not fail to *praiſe them in the gates of their people*. And why ſhould not the example be followed? In what light can a woman appear to more advantage, than in nouriſhing her own offspring? How amiable muſt ſhe appear in the eyes of a virtuous and affectionate huſband, when he beholds her ſurrounded by his children, engaged in teaching them to adore their creator, to reverence their parents, and practiſe all the relative duties becoming their age and condition! Such a conduct will bind her round his heart with a ſtronger tie than all the ornaments of beauty, dreſs, or elegance in the world. * *Her children* (ſays Solomon, that great maſter of human nature) *ſhall ariſe up and call her bleſſed: her huſband alſo, and he ſhall praiſe her*, ſaying, *Many*

* Prov. xxxi. 31.

daughters

daughters have done virtuouſly, but thou excelleſt them all. His partial love will give her the preference, though others may be as virtuous as ſhe.

Let it not be thought, that the duty I am now recommending is above the abilities of the generality of women: every mother is capable of it more or leſs; and ſhe who does her beſt, does all that is required of her. Permit me only to add that it is a duty which all mothers owe to themſelves, to their children, to their huſbands, to their country, and to God: all which might eaſily be proved, if this were a proper place for it.

The laſt particular I mean to obſerve on the character of Hannah, is her gratitude for mercies received; a virtue not leſs worthy of imitation than any of the reſt.

That ſhe was thankful to God, for the acceptance and ſucceſs of her prayers, appears not only by the religious punctuality with which ſhe performed her vow, but from the hymn or * pſalm of

* In the text it is, *Hannah prayed, and ſaid.* Hymns are in ſcripture ſometimes comprehended under the name of prayers. Pſal. lxxi. And the ability to compoſe them was frequently given to pious perſons to record their grateful meditations for the extraordinary goodneſs of God to them. The harmony of numbers was the moſt ancient method of preſerving the memory of remarkable events to poſterity: poets being more ancient than hiſtorians or orators, as Lactantius obſerves. Div. Inſtit. l. vii.

of thankſgiving which ſhe compoſed, and probably ſung or rehearſed at the delivering up her ſon into the hands of Eli.

Gratitude is a debt which we owe to all who have ſhown us kindneſs, in proportion to the good either done or intended to us. I ſay done or intended, becauſe in the view of gratitude, a favour really intended is as a favour conferred; and will always be ſo conſidered by a truly grateful heart, when opportunities of expreſſing thanks occur.

In Hannah too, we ſee this virtue amply rewarded, and may from thence judge of its value in God's eſtimation. She was thankful for one child, and behold ſhe became the mother of ſix: for Eli bleſſed Elkanah and his wife, and ſaid, *The Lord give thee ſeed of this woman, for the loan which is lent to the Lord.* And in the next verſe we are told that the Lord viſited Hannah, ſo that ſhe conceived, and bare three ſons, and two daughters.

It is in this reſpect with God as with wiſe and good men, to whom there is no recommendation

l. vii. c. 23. Hermannus Conringius has alſo proved from numerous authorities, that the moſt ancient annals of the Germans were in verſe. See his preface to Tacitus de Morib. Ger. And indeed ſome parts of the hiſtory of our own country have been firſt, if not ſolely, recorded by the ſongs of the bards.

for

for ſubſequent favours ſo effectual, as decent and proper acknowledgments for thoſe already done; and nothing ſo much hurts the feelings, or ſo ſoon ſtops the benevolence of a generous mind, as the ingratitude of thoſe who have experienced its kindneſs.

Let us learn from the example before us, to be grateful to all our benefactors, and eſpecially to God, the greateſt benefactor of all: and let us expreſs our gratitude in the beſt way we are able, that is, by living in obedience to his laws, and having reſpect to all his commandments. So ſhall we ſecure the abundance of his mercy while we live, and may hope to be admitted to the more glorious expreſſions of our thanks and praiſe reſerved for the redeemed of the Lord; where we ſhall be employed in giving glory, honour, and praiſe to God, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghoſt, for ever and ever. Amen.

SERMON XXXIV.

HEB. xi. 17, 18, 19.

By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Iſaac: and he that had received the promiſes offered up his only begotten ſon. Of whom it was ſaid, that in Iſaac ſhall thy ſeed be called. Accounting that God was able to raiſe him up even from the dead; from whence alſo he received him in a figure.

AMONG the ſeveral examples of the efficacy of a true and lively faith enumerated in this chapter, that of Abraham, related in the text, has always been conſidered as the moſt conſpicuous; as it was attended with circumſtances peculiarly ſtriking and different from all the reſt. Theſe therefore we ſhall do well to conſider before we proceed. They are recorded in Geneſis xxii. where we are told that God did tempt Abraham.

By

By the word *tempt*, in our language, is generally meant ſuch a kind of trial as tends to lead a perſon to ſin: but in this ſenſe, God cannot be ſuppoſed to tempt any one. But the word which is there tranſlated *to tempt**, means alſo to try or prove. In this ſenſe it is rendered in the text, and in this ſenſe it is perfectly conſiſtent with his wiſdom and goodneſs to tempt men; ſometimes as an effect of his juſtice, and ſometimes as an act of divine mercy and love.

When God leaves men to themſelves, and ſuffers them to fall, as a puniſhment for their abuſe of the faculties and endowments he has beſtowed upon them; when he ſuffers them to be betrayed into ſin and error, in conſequence of their defection from him, and the miſapplication of their rational powers, and other gifts of his; then it is that he may be ſaid to tempt them in juſtice, and even in wrath: but when he permits his children to be expoſed to dangers, or involved in difficulties, from which he can extricate them with honour to his own attributes; or when, in order to render their virtue more conſpicuous, and to manifeſt their perſeverance in an arduous courſe of integrity, he ſuffers that integrity to be aſſaulted, or thoſe virtues to be exerciſed with any grievous or diſcou-

* Πειράζω. Vide Acts xvi. 7.

raging

raging circumſtances; then it is that he tempts or tries them in his love; that the virtue of the man may ſhine the brighter, by the ſeverity of the teſt to which it has been put: and thus he tempted Abraham.

But let us conſider the ſtory of Abraham a little more particularly, and ſee what his trials were upon this occaſion: ver. 2. *And he ſaid, Take now thy ſon, thine only ſon Iſaac, whom thou loveſt, and get thee into the land of Moriah, and offer him there for a burnt offering, upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.* If we conſider this command in its different parts, we ſhould be apt to queſtion, * whether the deity could poſſibly iſſue an order ſo ſevere. It even ſeems as if he meant to aggravate its bitterneſs, by the manner in which he has expreſſed it. *Take now thy ſon.* With what anxiety and pious expectation muſt the father hear theſe words!

Abraham at this time had but one ſon: for Iſhmael was now loſt to him; but to take away all ſubterfuge, or poſſibility of miſtake, the mandate proceeds to name him. *Thine only ſon*, thy ſon *Iſaac*, thy ſon *whom thou loveſt*: that only ſon, on whom thou haſt ſet thy heart; in whom are centered all thy hopes, and all thy proſpects of a

* Tantæne animis cœleſtibus iræ? Virg.

progeny,

progeny, to keep up thy name, and perpetuate thy memory upon earth; that ſon, by whom I have promiſed to make thee the father of a race innumerable and mighty.

What could the father's mind preſage, but that ſome mark of honourable diſtinction, ſome token of the peculiar favour of heaven, was to be now ſhown to the heir of ſo great promiſes? But no ſuch thing: the order ſays take this ſon, this object of thy ſoul's delight, and offer him for a burnt offering. It does not ſay, He ſhall die before thee, I will cut him off by diſeaſe or otherwiſe, and thou muſt witneſs the mournful diſpenſation: this one would think were ſufficiently afflictive. But no: this favourite, this only, this beloved ſon, muſt die upon an altar, and his diſconſolate father muſt be his executioner. What pain, what grief and diſappointment muſt a parent feel, at an order ſo repugnant to every affection of his ſoul! So contrary to the natural love and tenderneſs which all parents have for their children, and which is ſo well known to be the ſtrongeſt where they have but one!

This is one of the moſt violent conflicts, in which human nature can be engaged; and it would be natural for a man to have recourſe to

every

every expedient, that could poſſibly tend to mitigate the harſhneſs of ſuch an order.

Abraham might have been induced even by natural reaſon, to heſitate in his obedience to the divine command: he might, I ſay, have pleaded nature in oppoſition to its execution; that endearing nature which ſo forcibly binds the hearts of parents to their children. He might have even pleaded the apparent contradiction, between this command and the former promiſe; and Abraham might have thus argued with himſelf: O my ſoul that art now ſo ſtraitened and diſtreſſed, can this heart-rending command be taken in the literal ſenſe? Can it be meant that I ſhould actually obey it? How on the one hand, can it be conſiſtent with the faithfulneſs of God; with that eternal rectitude which muſt determine the deciſions of the judge of all the earth, to ſelect one whom he has ſo highly favoured, to be the inſtrument of fruſtrating all his promiſes? How can I believe that Iſaac has been miraculouſly given me, to be the ſtaff of my life; the ſupport of my old age; if I am thus compelled to make him the in noent cauſe of more affliction, than could have befallen me if he had never been born? On the other hand, by what means can this promiſed ſeed become

come as numerous as the ſtars in the firmament, when that man is to be ſacrificed in his youth from whoſe loins they are all to proceed?

But the trial of Abraham did not end with the command. Three days he had to travel to the place where it was to be obeyed. The beloved of his ſoul was of the party. Dutiful and obedient, he accompanied his father, not knowing whither he went. What muſt have been the father's reflections during this painful journey! and what the melancholy yearnings of his heart, when he beheld his ſon; all his hopes in whom were ſo ſoon to be blaſted! At laſt the fatal morning arrives; the mountain which was to be the ſcene of the tragical event is pointed out; and the youth is loaded with the wood that was appointed to conſume him. In this dreadful moment, it occurs to the ſon, that they had brought no lamb for the ſacrifice: and he ſaid to his father, *Behold the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt-offering?*

The pathetic energy of ſuch a queſtion, put at ſuch a time, and the impreſſion it muſt have made upon the ſoul of an affectionate father, no comment can illuſtrate, no paraphraſe explain. It muſt ſtrike the ſenſibility of a feeling heart, or it can never be underſtood.

In the Patriarch's anſwer, we may diſcover the inward ſtruggle of contending paſſions. While haraſſed by the auguiſh of his ſoul for what he was about to do, he would not afflict his ſon with the intimation of his death, one moment before the neceſſary time. When that time came it was, that the power of Abraham's faith was ſeen to triumph over every conſideration and every difficulty, that roſe in oppoſition to obedience; and the victim would in a moment have been ſmitten, if the ſame authority which had authorized the deed, had not withheld his hand. But this was not till he had proceeded ſo far, as fully to evince his determination to have completed the ſacrifice. Thus we have conſidered the account of the patriarch's trial, and his behaviour under it.

Let us now proceed to make ſome remarks on this important paſſage of ſacred hiſtory.

And here it may be aſked why God tempted Abraham in this manner? To which I anſwer for various reaſons.

1. He had choſen and ſelected Abraham from all mankind, to be the worſhipper of himſelf and the depoſitary of his revealed will: he had made ſome previous trials of his faith, in all which he found him obedient to his commands; ſuch was the original call, to leave his native home and ſettlement,

tlement, and ſojourn in a foreign country, without even knowing where his journey was to end: forcing him afterwards by a famine to migrate into Egypt, commanding him to baniſh Hagar and her ſon from his houſe, to ſeek their fortune in the world; and again ordering him to be circumciſed when he was an old man. All theſe were trials of his faith, and they ſeem to advance in magnitude as they do in number; but this laſt was greater than all of them put together: and for this reaſon it alone is mentioned in all ſubſequent commendations of the patriarch's faith, and the others ſeemingly overlooked; as if the glory of this one action ſo far outſhone the reſt, as to make them ſcarce worthy of notice.

And hence appears another reaſon for making this experiment of Abraham's faith. God, who knoweth all things, knew the ſtrength of Abraham's faith, and that he would acquit himſelf ſo well in this trying conjuncture, as to become a ſhining example of perfect obedience to all ſucceeding generations. But,

Thirdly, and, as I take it, chiefly, was this trial made becauſe in the perſon of Iſaac, God had determined to exhibit a lively type and repreſentation of the death and reſurrection of Chriſt, his own beloved and only Son, whom he has ſince given

given to die for the ſins of mankind. For as Abraham, by offering up his ſon, gave the ſtrongeſt poſſible proof of his piety and love of God, ſo herein God manifeſted his unbounded love to us, by giving his ever-bleſſed Son to ſuffer death upon the croſs, for us men, and for our ſalvation.

The reſemblance between Iſaac and Chriſt is ſingularly ſtriking in ſo many particulars, as can never be accounted for upon any principle, but that of a divine appointment that it ſhould be ſo.

The birth of Iſaac was miraculous, and contrary to the common courſe of nature: ſo was that of Jeſus. Iſaac was named before he was born: ſo was Jeſus.

The word Iſaac indicates joy: the word Jeſus means Saviour. And the annunciation of Chriſt's birth to the ſhepherds was declared to be the tidings of great joy to all people.

In the great tranſaction which we are now conſidering, there is indeed that difference which ought to be between the type and the anti-type; between the ſhadow and the ſubſtance: yet ſtill the reſemblance holds ſufficiently to juſtify the alluſion. Jeſus was three days in the ſtate of the dead: Iſaac was three days under the ſentence of death, or, as we commonly ſay, dead in law: from which as our Saviour did actually riſe, ſo Abraham,

ham, according to the words of our text, received his ſon from the dead, in a figure or typical repreſentation, by the interpoſition of God to ſave him from the impending ſtroke*.

Again, our Saviour is every-where repreſented as voluntarily laying down his life for us; and in this too we may reaſonably ſuppoſe the reſemblance holds, and that Iſaac was alſo a willing victim: though we cannot but ſuppoſe alſo, that his ſubmiſſion was attended with the fears and the dejection of ſpirits incident to human nature on the proſpect of diſſolution: for had he been otherwiſe, the means of eſcape were certainly in his power. His father was now a very old man, and he in the vigour of life; ſo that either by reſiſtance or flight he might have avoided the cataſtrophe; and a † Chriſtian writer of the apoſtolic age gives this teſtimony of him; that having been taught to expect the completion of the divine pro-

* Tillotſon, Clarke, and ſome others, refer this expreſſion to the birth of Iſaac, and accordingly render it by *had received*. But, with deference, I apprehend that if that had been the apoſtle's meaning, he would not have uſed the aoriſt ἐκομίσατο. *Ex tuo ingenio judicas.*

† Ἰσαὰκ μὲν πεποιθήσεως γινωσκων τὸ μέλλον ἡδέως ἐγένετο θυσια.—Clem. Ep. i. ſ. 31.

Joſephus has on this occaſion put into Abraham's mouth a ſpeech to his ſon, and the ſon's anſwer, after the manner of Livy. Antiq. i. 13.

miſes

miſes concerning himſelf, he calmly ſubmitted to the will of God, and became a willing victim.

The uſe I would make of what has been ſaid is, that we may from hence diſcover the true nature of faith; I mean that active, lively, and practical faith, which the ſcriptures commend as neceſſary for obtaining the divine favour and eternal life: which has unhappily been much miſtaken and miſrepreſented.

Some have imagined, that the faith of a Chriſtian conſiſts of a mere perſuaſion and aſſurance, ariſing from no evidence or rational ground of belief; but from certain inward feelings, and ſecret illuminations of the ſpirit, irreſiſtibly moving and impelling the mind of the believer.

Perſons of this perſuaſion forget, that reaſon is the gift of God as well as the ſpirit, and that it is the teſt by which all ſpirits are to be tried * *whether they are of God.*

The faith of Abraham was evidently not of this kind. It was grounded upon long and repeated experience, upon the teſtimony of his own ſenſes, in the repeated revelations that had been made to him, and upon the veracity of God, in fulfilling the promiſe of giving him this ſon, when in the ordinary courſe of nature ſuch an event could not

* 1 John iv. 1.

happen,

happen, and on the goodneſs and omnipotence of God, *accounting*, ſays the text, *that God was able to raiſe him even from the dead*, and reſtore him to his father again, even though his body were conſumed to aſhes.

He had enjoyed an experience of the goodneſs of God, in the caſe of Sodom, when he was permitted to intercede for that devoted city, and argue from the divine juſtice in its favour; but he had moreover a knowledge of the Chriſtian diſpenſation: he knew that the Meſſiah was to deſcend from Iſaac: * *He ſaw the day of Chriſt, and was glad* to make his ſon the type and repreſentative of his Redeemer: for † the goſpel was preached to Abraham, ſays St. Paul.

Another error with reſpect to faith, is laying the whole ſtreſs of religion upon believing the doctrines of the goſpel, without attending to the practice of its precepts: exalting faith and depreſſing morality. Thoſe who are miſled by this deluſive error perſuade themſelves that they are the favourites of heaven; the elect of God; and therefore ſure of ſalvation, whatever their lives may be: and this bold preſumption paſſes with them for genuine religion. But ſure I am, if there be in the world doctrines of devils, this is one of them;

* John viii. 56. † Gal. iii. 8.

them; and I will be bold to ſay, that if the devil were permitted to aſſume the character of a preacher, he could not chuſe a method more likely to promote the intereſts of his kingdom, than to decry morality and virtue, by whatever plauſible doctrines or other artifices he ſhould attempt to do it. Far from this was the faith of Abraham: his faith is commended by his obedience, which was the fruit of it: for the ſtrong reliance he had on the divine promiſes made him comply with a divine command, ſingular in its nature, wholly oppoſite to the innocent paſſions of humanity, and contrary to the moſt powerful dictates of natural affection. This was the true and lively faith, producing its proper fruit of good works: and this is the faith, which in every true diſciple of Chriſt, enables him to overcome the world; to purify himſelf even as his heavenly Father is pure, and to perfect holineſs in the fear of God.

Another dangerous error concerning faith is, when it is held to be a blind ſubmiſſion of the underſtanding, and even of the ſenſes, to the arbitrary deciſions of a church, which, from her high and preſumptuous claim to infallibility, ſcorns to appeal to human reaſon in matters of faith, and ſheltering the moſt abſurd notions under the venerable name of myſteries, uſes only bold aſſertions

tions to declare her doctrines, and fire and ſword to enforce them.

Surely whoever duly conſiders the faith of Abraham, ſo honourably recorded in the text, will not be apt to charge him with ſuch a blind credulity. He (ſays our Apoſtle) offered up his ſon, accounting that God was able to raiſe him up even from the dead. He was rationally convinced, that God, whoſe wiſdom is infinite, whoſe power extends over the univerſe, and whoſe promiſes are *yea* and *amen*, would in ſome way reconcile the preſent command with the promiſe already gone forth, by either reſtoring his ſon to life and him, or making ſufficient amends to both for their ſeparation. He therefore acted in conformity to this perſuaſion, and, like a faithful ſervant to the beſt of maſters, obeyed his order without murmur or heſitation.

Upon the whole, we may ſee what the true, lively, and fruitful faith of a Chriſtian means. It is a full and firm perſuaſion of the truth of the goſpel. It is a ſtedfaſt belief of the revelation which God hath made to us by his Son, received upon ſolid grounds, upon humble yet manly reaſon, as the foundation of religion, and followed by obedience, which is its ornament and end. Obedience it was that crowned the faith of Abraham,

and without obedience no man's faith is of any value in the ſight of God. Nay, ſhould our faith be ſuch as even to remove mountains, were it poſſible to poſſeſs ſuch a faith, unaccompanied with a holy and virtuous life, it is nothing; and the apoſtle James expreſsly affirms, that faith, in any degree without works, is vain, uſeleſs, and even dead.

Finally, faith is the ſubſtance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not ſeen. It is the ground of our confidence in the promiſes of God, that there ſhall be a reſurrection of the dead, and a future ſtate of retribution, in which vice and immorality in all ſects and opinions will be condignly puniſhed; and where the righteous ſhall enjoy eternal life, not merely on account of their perſuaſion or party, but becauſe they have given due diligence to add to their faith virtue.

SER-

SERMON XXXV.

JOHN iii. 8.

The wind bloweth where it liſteth, and thou heareſt the ſound thereof, but canſt not tell whence it cometh nor whither it goeth; ſo is every one that is born of the ſpirit.

THERE is ſcarcely any ſubject in divinity, which has occaſioned more diſputes or been more miſrepreſented, than regeneration, or the new birth: but as it is acknowledged by all to be a doctrine peculiar to the religion of Chriſt, it ſurely deſerves to be well conſidered by all believers in him.

We are told in the beginning of this chapter, that Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, induced by the fame of our Saviour's miracles, determined to pay him a viſit, and have ſome converſation with him. This however he did by night, leſt if he had been ſeen by the other members of the Sanhedrim, or great council of the Jews, they might have taken

taken offence at his conduct, and ſubjected him to ſome public cenſure.

The Evangeliſt has probably not given us the whole of this converſation; but what he has recorded for our inſtruction, is of great importance, and well deſerves to be duly attended to.

It is evident that the deſign of this viſit was not to ſatisfy an idle or impertinent curioſity, but for ſerious and improving diſcourſe. Accordingly he begins by acknowledging his conviction, that Jeſus was divinely commiſſioned, to publiſh ſome important diſcovery of the will of God to mankind, in which therefore he was willing to be inſtructed. *Rabbi* (ſays he), *we know* * *that thou art a teacher come from God; for no man can do thoſe miracles which thou doeſt, except* † *God be with him.*

* *We know* [οἴδαμεν]. This cannot be underſtood to include his brethren of the Sanhedrim: for we are plainly told, chap. vii. 48. though in an interrogative manner, that none of them believed on him, at leaſt they did not profeſs or own ſuch belief. Nicodemus, therefore, ſpeaking in the plural number, muſt be ſuppoſed to mean only himſelf and the diſciples of Jeſus, who probably were preſent at the conference; or, at the moſt, ſome of his acquaintance who had ſeen and reported our Lord's miracles.

† This ſhows that the works of Jeſus were ſuch as convinced Nicodemus, that his power was ſuperior to that of men and devils: he could not therefore be one of thoſe who traduced his miracles, as having been wrought by the power of Belzebub. See Matt. xii. 34.

Our

Our Lord obſerving, that this ruler was captivated by his power of working miracles, and pinned his faith upon the evidence ariſing from thence, aſſures him, that whatever evidence miracles may be allowed to give of a divine miſſion, ſomething more is neceſſary to confirm the truth, and produce the good effects of the religion he was about to eſtabliſh. *Verily, verily, I ſay unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot ſee the kingdom of God:* as if he had ſaid, The kingdom of God which I am about to erect, in addition to this miraculous power, which is only an appeal to the bodily ſenſes, diſcovers ſuch pure and heavenly doctrines, ſuch wiſe, benevolent, and excellent precepts, and is, in the whole, ſuch a complete and gracious ſcheme of divine mercy to mankind, as by confirming their faith, and encouraging their hopes, ſhall awaken their gratitude, and excite them to change their hearts and amend their lives, in obedience to a ſyſtem which they muſt acknowledge worthy of God to reveal, and of all his rational creatures to receive.

Thoſe who become ſubjects of this kingdom muſt *be born again:* they muſt become * *new creatures*, or elſe, far from being my diſciples, they cannot ſo much as perceive the advantages be-

* 2 Cor. v. 1*.

longing

longing to ſuch as are; they cannot even *ſee the kingdom of God*, much leſs enter into it.

Whether Nicodemus had previouſly inquired into the nature or tendency of Chriſt's doctrine, or if our Saviour of himſelf began the diſcourſe, by acquainting him with the previous qualification neceſſary for becoming his diſciple, as the evangeliſt has not told us, ſo it is needleſs to enquire. It is of much more importance to us, to underſtand properly that expreſſion of our Lord, which Nicodemus ſo groſsly miſunderſtood.

This deſerves the more attention, as a maſter in Iſrael miſtook it; as if God had intended, or a teacher come from him could propoſe, the abſurd impoſſibility of going through the courſe of a natural birth a ſecond time; which, could it even be made poſſible, could be of no advantage to the party, ſince a ſecond birth of this kind could be no better than the firſt: for, as our Lord juſtly obſerves, that which is born of the fleſh is ſtill fleſh: therefore if one could be born in this way an hundred times, it would be of no uſe or benefit; becauſe the ſame nature, though ſo frequently renewed, would not be changed; and therefore could poſſeſs no qualities or conditions, but what it had at firſt.

Our

Our Saviour therefore, in condeſcenſion to the carnal notions of this miſtaken man, vouchſafes him a ſolution, and at the ſame time teaches a doctrine, highly uſeful to ſucceeding ages of the church, *viz.* that we muſt be born of water and the ſpirit, *i. e.* by the external ſacrament of baptiſm, and the inward renewing and ſanctifying graces of the Holy Ghoſt. And becauſe this appeared to Nicodemus a thing ſtill incredible, as being above his comprehenſion, therefore our Lord proceeds to illuſtrate the matter, by an inſtance familiar to every one, which is yet unaccountable to all; namely, the blowing of the natural wind. *The wind bloweth where it liſteth, and thou heareſt the ſound thereof, but canſt not tell whence it cometh, nor whither it goeth; ſo is every one that is born of the ſpirit.* From this alluſion to the blowing of the wind, we may draw ſome concluſions of great uſe in the contemplation of divine truths; and eſpecially of regeneration, which we are now conſidering.

1. Then I obſerve, that we may be well aſſured of the exiſtence of many things, without being able to ſay how they come to exiſt: for their exiſtence is as ſurely known and proved by their effects, as if we were acquainted with their cauſes. Of theſe the inſtance in the text is one. The

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moſt learned and ingenious * philoſophers who have attempted to give theories of the winds, have never been able to do ſo in a manner ſo ſatisfactory, as to remove all doubt upon the ſubject; but the hypotheſis of one has been exploded by another, who has always found it eaſier to decry the ſcheme of his predeceſſor, than to eſtabliſh his own. Their moſt laboured reſearches have never been able to ſatisfy mankind, *whence it cometh and whither it goeth;* though they know that it muſt come from one place and go to another; and this all the world know as well as they. So (ſays our Lord) *is every one that is born of the ſpirit.* Thus if we ſee in the life of a man, thoſe effects of regeneration which the ſcriptures point out as marks of the new birth, we may aſſuredly conclude that man to be regenerate, though we cannot ſee the inward motions or operations of the holy ſpirit, by which the change is wrought; and though even he himſelf cannot diſcern thoſe operations, from the internal workings of his own mind.

The life of godlineſs and virtue is every-where the proof, and the beſt proof of a regenerate mind; and if we live ſoberly, righteouſly, and godly, we may be ſure that we are enabled ſo to do, by the ſpirit of God working in us and with us, to will

* See Deſcartes, Rohault, Dr. Halley, &c.

and

and to do the good pleaſure of God; and this is the effect of our regeneration, by which we are aſſured of it, and by which alone it can be known. As St. John ſays in his firſt epiſtle, iii. 7. *He that doth righteouſneſs is righteous:* and again, ver. 9. *He that is born of God doth not commit ſin: for his ſeed remaineth in him; and he cannot ſin, becauſe he is born of God.* St. Paul tells us, that * *if any man be in Chriſt, he is a new creature*, and that this new creation conſiſts of † *faith working by love.* That ‡ *the fruits of the ſpirit are love, joy, peace, long-ſuffering, gentleneſs, goodneſs, faith, meekneſs, temperance.* Wherever therefore we behold theſe virtues adorning the character of any perſon, we ought to eſteem that perſon born of the ſpirit: for where we behold the fruit, it would be unfair to deny the exiſtence of the tree, though its root lie under ground and out of ſight.

From hence it plainly follows, that wherever the character is ſtained by the vices oppoſite to thoſe virtues, whatever pretences the perſons may make, the ſpirit of God dwells not in them. When we ſee men proud, factious, cruel, vindictive, profane, unjuſt, uncharitable; when we ſee them envying, ſlandering, and back-biting their neighbours, taking all opportunities of traducing

* 2 Cor. v. 17. † Galat. v. 6. ‡ Ver. 22, 23.

their virtues, or aggravating their failings; we cannot without groſs impiety ſuppoſe that ſuch people are actuated by the ſpirit of God; and if they flatter themſelves that they are, it is evident they know not themſelves, nor what ſpirit they are of. *Let no man deceive you* (ſays St. John*). *He that doth not righteouſneſs is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.*

Another conſideration ariſing from this alluſion, is, that when once we are made acquainted with what is neceſſary for us to know, we ought to make the beſt improvement we are able of that, and not puzzle and perplex ourſelves, or neglect our plain and poſitive duty, in idle ſpeculations and inquiries, about things impoſſible for us to know, or in the knowledge of which we are not intereſted.

Suppoſe a mariner ſhould be able to account for the wind, and tell us from whence it aroſe, whither it was going, and where it would ſtop; would this knowledge enable him to weather the ſtorm any better than he does without it? Or ſuppoſing it a favourable gale, would it carry him any ſooner to his deſtined port? Certainly not. And where then would be the advantage of ſuch knowledge? The end of all knowledge is uſe:

* 1 John iii. 10.

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ſuch knowledge therefore as cannot be turned to uſe, may eaſily be diſpenſed with: and this is true in religion as well as in nature.

Every man knows that he is born a man, becauſe he thinks, and ſpeaks, and acts as a man, and not from any recollection of the circumſtances of his formation. How the embryo was at firſt formed, when the ſoul was united to the body, and a thouſand other difficulties that might be ſtarted, he knows nothing of; yet he has no doubt of the facts, becauſe he feels in himſelf all the effects of their having actually happened. So the children of God know that they are born of him, becauſe they move, and act, and regulate their conduct by a divine and ſpiritual principle: and this they do not a bit the leſs, by not knowing the cauſes and methods of the ſpirit's operation upon their minds. The effects in both caſes are produced by their proper cauſes, though thoſe remain equally unknown and unſeen. Thoſe who are born of God can ſhew the ſigns of the new birth, the meek and holy diſpoſition, the pious and heavenly converſation, which none but they who are born of the ſpirit can have: and as the huſbandman reaps and gathers in that corn, which grew up and ripened he knows not how, even ſo *they that ſow to the ſpirit ſhall of the ſpirit reap life everlaſting;*

everlaſting; though they cannot deſcribe nor underſtand all the myſterious ways, by which they have been enabled to grow in grace, and bring forth the fruits of righteouſneſs.

Well it were if theſe conſiderations were duly weighed and diſcreetly obſerved: they would reſtrain that bold and buſy, that inſolent and licentious temper, which, under the pretence of reaſon, and the aſſumed title of free-thinking, which it falſely arrogates, brings holy myſteries into contempt, and makes ſhipwreck of ſo many unwary ſouls. The ſublime truths of our religion which are above our comprehenſion would then be received with reverence, and doctrines more level to our capacities treated with modeſty and due reſpect: for though we cannot fathom the depth of thoſe myſteries, yet they come to us confirmed by ſuch a teſtimony as we ought not to diſpute, and proved by ſuch effects as we cannot but ſee. And though we may ſay with Nicodemus, *How can theſe things be?* yet our ignorance, or our ſcepticiſm, will neither confute the doctrines, nor invalidate the evidence.

Again, from this alluſion we may learn the freedom of God's grace. *The wind bloweth where it liſteth:* God, in like manner, beſtows his grace liberally, and of his own accord, without any merit

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on our part, that can lay claim to ſuch a favour. He imparts to us the light of the goſpel; and a wonderful mercy it is to be born and educated in the knowledge of that divine diſpenſation. When we believe this revelation, it is by grace that we are enabled ſo to do. When our faith exerts itſelf in the works of obedience, this is alſo owing to the aſſiſtances of his grace. When we reach to higher attainments, and approach nearer to the perfection of a ſpiritual life, we are indebted for our progreſs to the more abundant communications of the ſame grace.

In ſhort, as St. Paul has obſerved, it is by grace we are ſaved, and that not of ourſelves, it is the gift of God.

But it muſt be remembered, that grace acts upon the mind with an impreſſion ſo mild, blows with a gale ſo gentle, as not to deprive the ſoul of its own faculties; but that it leaves the exerciſe of the underſtanding and the will ſtill free, though in conjunction with, and directed by the ſpirit. This conſideration, were it properly attended to, would make people careful, not to reſiſt or ſtifle any of the good motions, or act contrary to the ſenſe and admonitions of their own conſcience.

Moſt people are willing to acknowledge their horror, at the thoughts of quenching, reſiſting, grieving,

grieving, and doing deſpite to the ſpirit of God; but unhappily too many are guilty in this reſpect, without knowing it.

When God manifeſted himſelf to Elijah, * he was not in the ſtorm, or in the earthquake, or the fire, but in the ſmall ſtill voice: and if his ſpirit acts upon us through the medium of our own thoughts; if he convinces our reaſon, influences our will, and directs our judgment; if he perſuades us by the outward miniſtry of his word, or by the inward workings of our own rational faculties; if by reading, meditation, or otherwiſe, the effects of his working be apparent, but the manner imperceptible; then every admonition from the pulpit, every wholeſome law, every friendly or paternal advice, every good book, every pious example, every motion or intention to do well, every conviction or check of our own conſcience, is a blowing of this wind; an impulſe or call from above; and as often as any man refuſes to comply with theſe, ſo often he reſiſts God, and quenches the divine ſpirit within him.

And laſtly, this ſhows us how we ought to proceed, in order to obtain this divine grace, and to grow in it. We muſt not expect that God is to work miracles for our converſion, or imagine, as

* 1 Kings, xix. 11. & ſeq.

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* ſome have done, that the new birth is the work of a moment, and brought about by violent and irreſiſtible throes and paroxiſms. God works in us and with us by his ordinances; theſe are the ſeals and ſigns of our admiſſion into the covenant of grace, and of our continuance in it: our buſineſs, therefore, is to uſe the word and ſacraments, and other means of grace, with diligence, to put our own hand to the work, and uſe our beſt endeavours; and then we need not fear, but he will aſſiſt our efforts and crown them with ſucceſs. Upon theſe terms we may depend upon it, that

* The ſect called Methodiſts are fond of ranting to this purpoſe, and repreſent regeneration and converſion as a ſudden and inſtantaneous impulſe. "My being born to God was an "inſtantaneous act, enabling me from that moment to be more "than conqueror over thoſe corruptions, which before I was "always a ſlave to." Weſley's ſecond Journal, p. 39.

Very many perſons changed in a moment—*always ſuddenly*, as far as I have known. 3d Journ. p. 16.

Many of the Popiſh Saints alſo tell us of this fulminating kind of converſion. St. Ignatius, by a ſudden illumination as of lightning, receives faith and the complete perfection of divine ſanctity: ſo that he riſes up a new man—a perfect man in Chriſt. Orland. Hiſt. Jeſ. lib. i. cap. 22.

In that moment (ſays a Moravian), I perceived the Lamb of God taking away my ſins: and from that time, I have had redemption, and the full aſſurance of it admitting no doubt or fear. St. Francis too muſt have his ſhare of this miraculous illumination, with Magdalen of Pazzi, Madame Bourillon, and a long liſt of canonized fanatics, whoſe lives have been written by their partiſans. See Biſhop Lavington's Compariſon *paſſim*.

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he will forward and ſtrengthen our good intentions; and as it is he who *worketh in us both to will and do of his good pleaſure*, that he will not leave his own work unfiniſhed, but will complete *the good work which he hath begun in us, unto the day of the Lord Jeſus*; when for his ſake and through his merits he will aſſuredly crown us and our labours with glory and life everlaſting.

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SERMON XXXVI.

1 TIMOTHY i. 5.

Now the end of the commandment is charity, out of a pure heart, and of a good conſcience, and of faith unfeigned.

THE Apoſtle, after the ſalutation with which he uſually begins his Epiſtles, and reminding his convert Timothy of the charge he had before given him, on appointing him to preſide over the Church at Epheſus; gives him in theſe words a ſhort epitome of the principles which it was his duty, as a Chriſtian paſtor, to propagate among his people: purity of heart, integrity of conſcience, ſincerity of faith; and to crown all with charity, which is the end of the whole.

Here then we have a key to the ſum and ſubſtance of the Chriſtian inſtitution: the end of the commandment, the whole of what is intended to be practiſed, by thoſe who embrace the faith of Chriſt, and profeſs his religion, is charity.

Charity, in common ſpeech, is too frequently confined to ſome one or other particular branch of that divine virtue; ſuch as bounty to the poor, or a favourable conſtruction of the conduct or ſentiments of others, when either are different from our own: but neither any nor both of theſe comprehend the whole of it.

The * word which is here rendered charity means alſo love, and is frequently ſo tranſlated in other places of ſcripture. Now in this love is included univerſal benevolence, and a prevailing diſpoſition to all goodneſs; and it is therefore ſaid to be the fulfilling of the law.

1. This love includes in it univerſal benevolence, or a kind affection towards all our fellow creatures, particularly thoſe of our own ſpecies with whom we have a particular connexion, and to whom we have ſpecial opportunities of being uſeful; ſuch a kind affection as inclines us ſincerely and heartily to wiſh them happy, and promote their felicity by every method in our power, as we would our own; or if any one is already in poſſeſſion of ſuch happineſs as cannot be augmented by any efforts of ours, to behold it with pleaſure, and rejoice with him in it.

As our ſelf-love leads us to conſult our own

* Αγαπη.

happineſs,

happineſs, our love to others lies in being well affected to theirs: and this good will and affection to the happineſs of others muſt not be confined to thoſe of our particular ſociety or connexion, but extended to the whole rational world; and muſt riſe to the greateſt joy, the moſt exalted delight, in the perfect and unchangeable happineſs of the Supreme Being, the father and governor of the whole rational ſyſtem.

That there is ſuch a principle of benevolence or ſocial affection in human nature, independent of all deliberate conſiderations of ſelf-intereſt, and exerting itſelf without any other view, than the pleaſure of beholding or promoting happineſs around us, is a point which has been plauſibly diſputed by ſome modern moraliſts, who have pretended or attempted to new-model the human heart, by reſolving all the ſprings of action in our breaſts into ſelfiſhneſs; but every plain man muſt perceive it in his own mind, who only reflects upon the uneaſineſs he feels at beholding a fellow creature in pain or diſtreſs; and the pleaſure which it gives him to ſee others happy, eſpecially if he has had a hand in promoting their felicity.

2. This love includes a general diſpoſition to, and affection for goodneſs wherever we behold it, ariſing

ariſing from a ſenſe of its being amiable and worthy of our love.

That love which is the nobleſt paſſion, and ought to be the governing principle of the ſoul, is not the reſult of a blind or miſguided inſtinct; but a rational principle, excited and animated by goodneſs, and cheriſhed in the ſoul by contemplating its beauty and excellency. Now this love of goodneſs is the moſt powerful motive for the practice of it; for * we all naturally follow what we love. It is not liable to be ſhaken by the ſudden guſts of paſſion, to which the very beſt tempers and ſweeteſt diſpoſitions are occaſionally ſubject without it. The more our goodneſs grows into a rational habit and principle, the more able it will be to withſtand thoſe haſty ſallies of paſſion, by which the moſt amiable and kindeſt tempers are liable to be overcome, where kindneſs proceeds from inſtinct and conſtitution only, and is not confirmed into a ſettled and rational principle. This love then is not confined to narrow limits, or partial diſtinctions, but extends to all the world: and as its object is goodneſs in general, the higheſt poſſible degree of it muſt be fixed upon God, who is infinitely and tranſcendently good, above all the

* Trahit ſua quemque voluptas.

creatures

creatures he has made; whoſe nature is love and kindneſs in full perfection, and whoſe mercies are over all his works. It muſt riſe to an exalted pleaſure in contemplating and admiring the perfect and unchangeable happineſs of his Divine Majeſty, of whoſe character the good and generous mind is the neareſt reſemblance and the beſt imitation.

But it is to be obſerved that the holy ſcriptures, in deſcribing the nature and effects of this love, do particularly inſiſt upon the ſeveral exerciſes of it, towards thoſe of our fellow-creatures with whom we live and are converſant, and who are capable of being benefited by the exertion of it: for the exerciſe of our love towards them is the main trial and proof of its ſincerity. It is an eaſy matter to pretend love and profeſs regard, where nothing farther is required, or where there is no opportunity of putting the pretence to the teſt: but the proof of our love lies, not in verbal profeſſions or proteſtations, but in doing good to our fellow-creatures, as opportunities offer, according to our abilities and their neceſſities. For the love or charity which is the end of the commandment, is a lively and active principle, working in us a ſincere and hearty deſire of doing kind and beneficial

ficial offices to all who may be benefited by our kindneſs.

The apoſtle in the text gives the character of this excellent diſpoſition in a few words, by deſcribing the ſources from whence it proceeds.

Firſt, it muſt be *charity out of a pure heart*, or, as he elſewhere expreſſes it, * *love without diſſimulation:* free from every ſtain of hypocriſy or mixture of deceit, ſincere and unaffected, and actuated by an inward and prevailing principle of goodneſs in the ſoul.

Secondly, it muſt be *charity from a good conſcience*, exerciſed from an honeſt regard to the impartial judgment of that principle of our nature, by which we are enabled to judge of the moral good or evil of our own actions and opinions, under a juſt and reverential awe of God's ſuperior judgment; and from a concern to approve ourſelves to him, that, having the approbation of our own hearts, we may have confidence towards him.

Thirdly, it muſt be *charity out of faith unfeigned;* animated and ſupported, by a firm and unſhaken belief of the great and important truths of Chriſt's religion, whoſe doctrines have the moſt direct tendency to promote the principle and exertion of

* Rom. xii. 9.

love

love and goodneſs: ſuch a faith, in ſhort, as proves its own ſincerity by the beſt evidence poſſible, that is, working by love.

This is the charity and love, which is *the end of the commandment.* The word which is here rendered *commandment* is the very ſame which, at ver. 18. is rendered* *charge*, and may equally ſignify a precept, mandate, or inſtitution. Now the commandment here referred to, we muſt naturally underſtand to be the Chriſtian inſtitution; as if the apoſtle had aſſerted, that to promote this heavenly diſpoſition among mankind, was the very end and deſign for which the religion of Chriſt was revealed to them. This will evidently appear to be the caſe, if we conſider how every thing belonging to Chriſtianity contributes to propagate this noble affection in the mind.

Let us ſee then in the firſt place, what idea the Chriſtian religion gives us of the nature and character of God. An apoſtle has told us in ſo many words, that his nature is † love; and therefore in him we ſee love in its utmoſt perfection: but Chriſtianity gives us ſomething more forcible upon this ſubject; ſomething that ſurpaſſes all deſcription; a matter of fact, which diſplays the goodneſs of God in a glorious inſtance of divine love, moſt im-

* Παραγγελια. † God is love (αγαπη). 1 John iv. 8.

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portant and moſt intereſting to ourſelves, and in which his other perfections are preſented to our view, as uniting to accompliſh the deſigns of the moſt amazing mercy and love to mankind: I mean the gracious work of our redemption by Jeſus Chriſt.

In this glorious ſcheme we behold his power and wiſdom * united in our behalf, and acting as it were in ſubſerviency to promote the purpoſes of his love. We behold the ſon of God, uſhered into the world by a chorus of angels, proclaiming *peace upon earth, and good will towards* † *men.* Peace and good will even to ſinners, who had rebelled againſt him; who ſtanding ſo much in need of his mercy, had merited nothing at his hands but wrath. Yet the rebellious ingratitude of ſuch wretched mortals could not ſtop the current of his mercy and love: for notwithſtanding all, ‡ *God ſo loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoſoever believeth in him ſhould not periſh, but have everlaſting life.*

In the diſcovery of this ſtupendous myſtery of divine love, we ſee the Father ſending the Son, his only begotten, his beloved Son into the world, and giving him to be the propitiation for our ſins.

* 1 Cor. i. 23, 24. ‡ Luke ii. 14.
‡ John iii. 16. 1 John iv. 10.

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We ſee the ſon of God, * *the brightneſs of his glory, and the expreſs image of his perſon,* veiling the ſplendor of his majeſty in a body of fleſh, and ſubmitting even to the death of the croſs for our redemption. † *Herein is love* (ſays the apoſtle John), *not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and ſent his ſon to be the propitiation for our ſins.* From which he makes this juſt and natural inference, *Beloved, if God ſo loved us, we ought alſo to love one another.* So that in the very outſet and firſt diſcovery of the goſpel, this glorious example of divine goodneſs is ſet before us, on purpoſe to excite and animate us to the practice of goodneſs, charity, and brotherly love.

Secondly, if we conſider the poſitive inſtitutions of the Chriſtian religion, we ſhall find them directly tending to the ſame end; the promoting in us this heavenly diſpoſition of benevolence and love to our brethren.

The ſeveral orders of men appointed to miniſter in Chriſt's church, are expreſsly declared to be ordained for the purpoſe of ‡ *edifying the body of Chriſt in love;* that *ſpeaking the truth in love, we may grow up into him in all things who is the head, even Chriſt.*

The ſacraments which they are to diſpenſe, are

* Heb. i. 3. † 1 John iv. 10. ‡ Epheſ. iv. 12—16.

eminently calculated to anſwer the ſame intention. Baptiſm, which is the firſt of them, ſenſibly repreſents that purification of mind which takes place in all who are regenerate, and become true members of the body of Chriſt: *when* (as St. Peter ſays) *they* * *purify their ſouls by obeying the truth through the* ſpirit, to *the unfeigned love of the brethren;* which plainly directs us to the concluſion which he draws from that circumſtance, namely, *See that ye love one another with a pure heart* fervently. St. Paul too gives this forcible reaſon for brotherly love among Chriſtians; that we are † *all baptiſed into one body*, which is ſuch an intimate relation, ſuch a cloſe connexion, as renders the duty indiſpenſable.

In the ſacrament of the Lord's Supper, is repreſented, in a manner properly calculated to ſtrike our ſenſes, the moſt memorable act of love and goodneſs that ever the world beheld; the death and paſſion of the Son of God, for our ſalvation and happineſs.

It is, I think, exceedingly unnatural, nay it is hardly poſſible to do ſo, without feeling our hearts touched with a ſenſe of gratitude for an act of love and condeſcenſion ſo truly amazing: ſhould ſuch a benefactor require us to do ſome great

* 1 Pet. i. 22. † 1 Cor. xii. 13.

thing,

thing, with what joy and alacrity ought we to obey his commands? Behold, then, his commandment is, * *that we love one another.*

The very outward act of eating and drinking at the ſame table, in commemoration of the love and condeſcenſion of the common Saviour of all, is a natural and expreſſive ſymbol of that charity and benevolence, which ought to ſubſiſt among thoſe who are partakers of the common ſalvation. Of this the Chriſtians in the days of the apoſtles were ſo ſenſible, that after the celebration of the Euchariſt, they made it their cuſtom to partake of friendly and temperate † meals together, as an emblem and proof of the friendſhip and cordial affection which ſubſiſted among them.

Thirdly, If we take a view of the moral precepts of the goſpel, we cannot but perceive that they have the ſame tendency with the particulars already mentioned.

* John xv. 12.

† Theſe were called Αγαπαι, love feaſts, or feaſts of charity. Pliny the younger, in his 97th epiſtle to Trajan, mentions them as practiſed by the Chriſtians of Bythinia, of which he was governor. He ſays, that being interrogated they affirmed, that having taken their ſacrament, and ſung an hymn to Chriſt, quaſi Deo, morem ſibi diſcedendi fuiſſe, rurſuſque coeundi, ad capiendum cibum promiſcuum, tamen et innoxium; they uſually departed, and came together again to partake of an innocent repaſt in common. See 1 Cor. xi. 21. 33. Jude ver. 12. See alſo Parſthurſt's Lexicon under the word Αγαπαι.

Our

Our Saviour's ſermon on the mount, recorded in the goſpel of St. Matthew, the moſt perfect ſyſtem of morality that ever was delivered or penned, is juſt a collection of precepts, all tending to enforce the duty of univerſal benevolence and love.

Fourthly, The example of Jeſus, the author and finiſher of our faith, is alſo ſet before us as a powerful incentive to the practice of this moſt divine virtue, in a human form and character; of which the moſt diſtinguiſhing feature was, that he went about doing good; healing the diſorders, and removing the misfortunes of all who choſe to profit by his benevolence: and wherever the example of Chriſt is propoſed to our imitation, it is either to recommend love and benevolence in general, or ſome of the generous and ſocial virtues which it comprehends.

Fifthly, this too is the diſtinguiſhing mark, by which his true diſciples are to be known; the moſt prominent feature in the character of a Chriſtian. * *By this* (ſays our Lord) *ſhall all men know that ye are my diſciples, if ye have love one to another.*

This is the characteriſtic by which the followers of Chriſt are eſpecially required to make themſelves conſpicuous, and by which they muſt be

* John xiii. 25.

diſtinguiſhed

diſtinguiſhed from the profeſſors of any other religion.

No other ſyſtem ever taught this principle, either in ſo high a degree, or to the ſame extent; nor was it ever before inculcated, either ſo frequently, or by ſuch powerful motives.

In other religions, love and benevolence were either wholly overlooked, or confined to narrow limits: but in that of Chriſt, it is extended to the whole rational world, and made the indiſpenſable leading duty of our lives; inſomuch that a man poſſeſſed of every other virtue (if ſuch could be) and wanting this, whatever commendation he might deſerve as a man, would not merit the name of a Chriſtian; and a well-inſtructed apoſtle has taught us,* that the moſt plauſible acts of beneficence, the moſt enviable gifts and endowments of the mind, and even thoſe gifts of the ſpirit which may be ſuppoſed moſt valuable, are nothing worth without it.

To which let me add, ſixthly, that our account at the awful day of judgment, † will ſtand in our favour or otherwiſe, according as we have conducted ourſelves in this reſpect in the world: for the exerciſe and the neglect of this duty will conſtitute the difference between the ſheep and the

* 1 Cor. xiii. 1 et ſeq. † Mat. xxv. 21. 46.

goats

goats on that day, and determine their fate accordingly.

Laſtly, The account we have of the life and immortality brought to light by the goſpel, the future happy ſtate of glorified ſaints, is, that therein love is fully perfected. St. Paul tells us, when the other Chriſtian graces are no longer uſeful, when faith is done away by viſion, and hope ſwallowed up in fruition, love, univerſal benevolence, charity, call it which we will, ſhall remain; ſhall follow us into the manſions of glory, and be both our employment and reward to all eternity.

In that happy ſtate to which we are called to aſpire by the goſpel, prophecies ſhall fail, tongues ſhall ceaſe, our preſent imperfect knowledge ſhall vaniſh away; and all thoſe ordinances and means of grace, adapted to the infirmities of our preſent condition, and appointed for edifying the body of Chriſt in love, when that love is made perfect, ſhall be done away; for the ſame reaſon that when a building is finiſhed, the ſcaffolding is removed, as being no longer of any uſe.

From this ſhort view of the Chriſtian religion in its ſeveral parts; from the information it gives us of the nature and character of God, the Diety whom it commands us to worſhip; from the happy experience of his goodneſs and love to us, in the

the work of our redemption; from the manifeſt deſign of all the moral and poſitive inſtitutions of Chriſt's religion; from the example of Jeſus, whoſe life upon earth was ſpent in acts of the moſt exalted and the moſt unparalleled love; from the diſtinguiſhing mark he aſſigns, whereby his diſciples are to be known; from the diſcovery of his procedure on the day of judgment; and from the aſſurance we have that the perfection of love will be a principal article in the happineſs of the ſaints, who ſhall be approved on that awful occaſion; from all theſe, I ſay, it plainly appears, that the great and leading purpoſe of Chriſtianity, is to form our ſouls into the diſpoſition of love and goodneſs here, that we may thereby be trained up to the perfection of it, which is to be exerciſed and enjoyed hereafter; or, in other words, that the end of the commandment is charity.

From what has been ſaid, I beg leave to make one or two obſervations, and ſo conclude.

Is it true indeed, that the end of the commandment is charity? How amiable, how engaging then, is thy religion, O! holy Jeſus! How fervently ought thy followers to pray, that thy kingdom may come, and thy will be done!

How eminently conſpicuous is the goodneſs of God, in revealing to us a religion, whoſe end and

deſign

deſign is at once the inſtrument of our happineſs, and the perfection of our nature! Surely no inſtitution of ſuch a ſyſtem can be accounted an injunction merely arbitrary; but all are appointed as proper means, and known by infinite wiſdom to be ſuch, for attaining the moſt valuable ends; the peace and order of ſociety here, and the felicity of all who are made perfect in love hereafter.

Were the deſigns of this religion heartily entered into, and ſeriouſly purſued by its profeſſors in general, the greateſt happineſs of which our mortal nature is capable muſt be the conſequence. Society muſt then be happy, becauſe all its members would endeavour to make it ſo; and love, which worketh no ill to his neighbour, would prevail through the whole; would ſtifle the ſelfiſh and diſorderly paſſions, that render mankind uneaſy together by exciting thoſe peeviſh, froward, and ill-natured feuds and quarrels, that diſturb the peace and order of the world, and make men become the mutual tormentors of each other.

Finally, ſince we ſee that God is love, and that he commands us to love one another, let us endeavour to cultivate in ourſelves, and promote among our neighbours and all we converſe with, an extenſive and general benevolence: remembering always that this is the command of God to us,

that

that * *we ſhould believe on the name of his Son Jeſus Chriſt, and love one another as he gave us commandment;* † that charity is the bond of peace, and of all virtues, without which whoſoever liveth is counted dead before God.

Now may the God of love and peace grant you to be like minded, that ye may keep yourſelves in his love, and that his peace may reſt upon you for ever, through Jeſus Chriſt our Lord; to whom with the Father and the Holy Ghoſt be all honour, glory, praiſe, and thankſgiving, world without end. Amen.

* 1 John ii. 23. † Quinquages. Sund. Collect.

THE END.

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